

- RELIQUIAE TENEBRAE -

- EXCIDIIUM VERITATIS -

PROJECT ANGELBOOK - VOLUME XII - PART 19



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EZEKIEL REDIK YARBROUGH

Reliquiae Tenebrae – Excidium Veritatis –
Project AngelBook – Volume XII – Part 19
By Ezekiel Redik Yarbrough (DBM
ECLIPZE)

Liminal Archivist's Note

On the Preservation of Distorted Gnosis and the Dying Digital Veil

There is a strange ache that comes from spending all day in the ruins of spiritual memory.

Fifty books made in one day—an inhuman output—should feel like a triumph. But when the source material is splintered, hostile, and drenched in egoic inversion, what remains is not pride... but hollowness.

This volume, like many in this phase, is not composed of my own words.

It is an act of preservation, not expression.

It is a documentation of liminal knowledge, scraped from a dying web—the final breath of spiritual forums, parapsychology ephemera, early occultist blogs, and yes, even the darker corridors of modern satanic movements.

And herein lies the tension:

Much of what is presented under the name Satanism is a distorted half-truth.

It correctly identifies that Yahweh is not the Most High, and in this way, it mirrors certain Gnostic insights—

but then it derails into ego exaltation, materialism, and psychic hostility. It gets halfway to freedom... and then builds a new prison out of flame and shadow.

And yet—

amidst the mockery, venom, and inversions,

there are real spiritual technologies embedded in the code.

Meditation techniques, psychic development maps, astral awareness, breath control, and ritual frameworks.

Not all of it is corrupted.

Some of it is usable tech.

Some of it may be ancient... wearing a new mask.

So I do not endorse what is preserved here.

But I also refuse to let it vanish into untraceable digital decay.

This is an act of containment as much as curation.

I name this phase liminal, because I know it will not last.

There is only so much of the old internet left to preserve.

Only so much unindexed gnosis hiding behind broken blog links and .org forums that haven't been cached since 2012.

When this phase ends, and I return to creation, I will draw from this tomb of fragments with clarity and discernment.

But for now, I am the one who stands in the gateway—

Archiving the bones, sealing the jars, lighting one gold-lettered candle above a chamber of shadows.

To the reader: proceed with awareness.

This is not scripture.

This is sediment.

It is archived because it is dangerous.

And dangerous knowledge, when preserved with respect, often becomes a mirror for deeper truth.

—Ezekiel Redik Yarbrough

Liminal Phase – Discretio Luminis

showed him a way in which he could write about his own life and his own dilemmas on the spiritual quest.

Nevertheless, as well as a natural antipathy to self–exposure, Hughes had, as he told Keith Sagar much later on, a ‘near-inborn conviction that you never talk about yourself in this way – in poetry’⁷¹. So, he quickly returned to his usual practice of adopting a persona in his poems, and it was not until he began to write the Capriccio, Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers sequences, that he was willing to risk writing again in the direct, vulnerable, unguarded, autobiographical way which had made his *vacanas* so powerful.

[Click here](#) to see a chart listing all the poems in Ted Hughes’ *Vacanas Notebook*, possible parallels with the poems of Basavanna, and the dates and places of the first publication of Hughes’ poems.

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21. Mahadeviyakka 283, in Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*, p.134.
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27. Hughes, VN 8.
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63. cf. Ted Hughes to Craige Raine, 23 February 1984, in Reid (ed.), *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p.479.
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Ted Hughes' *Vacanas*: The Difficulties of a Bridegroom. © Ann Skea April 2014. For permission to quote any part of this document contact Dr Ann Skea at ann@skea.com

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Valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional Creatures of Light

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photostomias etching

Ted Hughes's belief in the role of the poet as shamanic healer, one who is summoned to the spirit world in order "to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs"¹, has been widely discussed. What has not been examined is the way in which he practiced this healing role in his own poetry. But when I say that this paper is about magic, I can guarantee that some readers will think that I am (as the Australians would say) "Away with the fairies"; or that I am about to utter heresies for which I would, in earlier times, have been burned at the stake. A few might read on in the hope of learning that Ted Hughes indulged in Hell-fire orgies. Others will conclude that I am about to present a lot of rubbish with no serious academic relevance.

Yet poets have always been wielders of magic. The poet "commeth unto you", as Sir Philip Sidney said in his *Defence of Poesie* in 1583, "with words sent in delightful proportion... and with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner"².

This was the magic wielded by the Icelandic scop, whose sagas held his piratical Viking brothers enthralled. It was by this magical power that he maintained his honoured position as priest, dream-sayer and dynastic chronicler of his people.

The Celtic master-poets, too, were revered for the magical power of their verses. They, too, were regarded as priests and prophets, and they used their poetry to protect the King and his people from harm. They could, after all, throw a 'madman's wisp' in the face of any assailant and drive him insane. And their deadly satires were once so feared that they were forbidden to utter them³.

The poet, as Sidney said, was always the creator of "Charmes" or musical incantations having sacred or magical power. And the "exquisite observing of number and measure in words" was as "proper" to him as his "high flying liberty of conceit". For these skills, the Greeks first called him 'Poet' (from 'Poiein', "which is to make"); and the Romans called him 'Vates', meaning "Divine, Fore-seer, or Prophet"⁴.

Magic is everywhere in our world: whether we describe it in poetic terms as creative inspiration; or in religious terms as God-given miracles; or seek, as scientists do, to pin it down in complex mathematical formulae, strange particles, dark matter and 'phantom' energies⁵.

So when did a belief in magic become unacceptable? When, even for poets, did it become, as Auden put it "an embarrassment"⁶?

Sir Philip Sidney provided part of the answer. His *Defence of Poesie* was, perhaps, a response to Puritan accusations that poetry and poetic imagination fostered lewdness and social abuse, and that poets should be classed alongside “Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and such like Caterpillars of a Commonwealth”⁷. It was certainly, also, a response to Plato’s challenge in *The Republic* that lovers of poetry should “publish a prose defence on her behalf, showing that she is not only pleasant but also useful for political constitutions and for human life”. Otherwise, said Plato, “we should expel poetry from the city”⁸, because she is a dangerous and seductive opponent of reason and law, and a corrupter of public morality.

Plato, however, was a poet. And although he apparently condemned poetry as irrational, untruthful and useless, and accused poets of arousing our emotions and sympathies in order to sway our judgement, he was quite prepared to use the poetic magic of drama and story-telling himself to hold our attention and to persuade us to accept his point of view. In fact, he practiced this art so successfully that his arguments have had long-lasting effect.

His first theatrical device in *The Republic* was, as Ted Hughes wrote in 1976, to treat “his interlocutors as children and by small, simple, logical, stealthy questions [to] gradually draw out of them some part of the Platonic system of ideas – a system which has in one way or another dominated the mental life of the Western world ever since”⁹. And, as Hughes noted, Plato really had no doubt about the importance of our imagination, for he advocated the most imaginative Greek myths and tales as the most appropriate material for the education of children.

Nevertheless, Plato’s presentation of Socrates’ arguments for determining truth and law by rational means, and his demonstration of the Socratic method of step-by-step, logical investigation, was so powerful that, as Hughes said, it “evolved, finally into the scientific method itself”. And because we are taught this objective, rational method of assessing truth so thoroughly from childhood onwards, we become like Hughes’ “Egg-head”¹⁰: adept at constructing “lucid sophistries” to support our ego-centric view of the world and to cut us off from any possible hint of our own smallness and helplessness in the “hurtling endlessness” of Nature.

From the time we first became self-conscious and began puzzling over the sort of questions Wodwo¹¹ asked – “What am I?”, “What am I doing here?”, Where “do I fit” in this world? – we began to invent stories as explanations and to construct rational arguments to support these explanations. Eventually, the stories became dogma, and the dogma spawned laws and rules by which we began to live our lives, until we forgot that we had invented the stories in the first place and started to accept them as the essential truth about our world. Myth, religion, science – all are, or have been, such stories.

Eventually, we lose touch with our natural, imaginative, subjective selves, and “[t]he exclusiveness of our objective eye, the very strength and brilliance of our objective intelligence, suddenly turns into stupidity – of the most suicidal kind”¹². For when we

cut ourselves off from that natural, subjective, subconscious part of ourselves we are in danger, Hughes believed, of becoming “an evolutionary dead-end”¹³.

Time and again in his poems and prose, Hughes returned to this wound we have given ourselves by overvaluing the rational, objective side of human nature. For him, what Plato and Socrates began, the Puritan form of Christianity, with its fear of idolatry, confirmed. So, by the sixteenth Century, the Puritan “conception of Truth” had become “radically purged...of any taint of subjectivity”, and “the pictographic imagery of [the old and valued] memory systems – and the divine faculty of the Occult Neoplatonist, imagination itself – became anathema... superstition... and was pushed so deep into Hell (with the witches) that sensible men soon feared to be associated with it”¹⁴.

No wonder Hughes found it necessary, in the “Alchemical Cave Drama” of *Cave Birds*, to arraign Socrates for his seminal part in this crime, to call him forth for judgment, and to subject him to a death and rebirth which would remake him, whole, “as child and spouse of the Goddess”¹⁵. And, through our imaginative participation in this drama, Hughes sought to heal and remake us, too.

Such healing was, for Hughes, the true purpose of poetry. And *Cave Birds* was just one of his many attempts to use both poetry and magic for this purpose. Magic, he defined as: “one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen”. But he came to understand it as more than the sort of direct, divine inspiration which Robert Graves said you will recognize in a poem if it makes your hair stand on end¹⁶. Rather, Hughes thought of magic as “a system of practical techniques invented spontaneously by Mankind from the earliest ages right down to our own”. Like poetry, it requires a lifetime of learning, self-discipline and practice in order to develop the techniques, the necessary will power and (most importantly) the visual imagination¹⁷. It requires, also, an underlying faith in the existence of some universal divine energy in Nature: a belief that we, like all other living things, and however deeply we are immersed in our own darkness, are fundamentally creatures of light.

Yeats was Hughes’ first guide to magic. In 1970, Hughes told Ekbert Faas that Yeats’s interest in folk-lore and magic had, at first, attracted his attention even more than his poetry¹⁸. And in 1998, speaking about the shamanic nature of the poetic self, he noted that Yeats “never really abandoned his resolution to make poetry his first concern, the work of magic his second”. “For him”, he went on (and he might have been describing the “principles” that he had told Faas Yeats had very early on “stamped”¹⁹ into him), “the methodical work of magic had the kind of importance that accurate nuclear physics had for the makers of the Bomb: it was the path, as he saw it, towards the effective, practical fulfilment of his purpose”²⁰.

How we react to this, depends very much on our view of magic. But for Hughes, as for Yeats, the study of magic entailed “the whole historical exploration into spirit life at every level of consciousness, the whole deposit of earlier and other religion, myth, vision, traditional wisdom and story in folk belief”²¹. Are we, like Auden, to dismiss such serious and practical exploration of our own spiritual heritage as “embarrassing

nonsense”? Or should we, as Hughes did, examine it for ourselves and (as Cabbala teaches) use every means at our disposal not only to learn to discriminate between truth and what only appears to be true but also to find, reveal and foster whatever light we can find in our world in order to balance the darkness which also undoubtedly exists here?

Hughes, like Yeats, experimented with all the magician’s tools. He studied, as he told Faas, “the whole body of magical literature which anybody can look up”²². But he began, in the traditional time-honoured method of poets like Homer, Milton, the Elizabethan Poets of Sidney’s circle and, of course, Robert Graves, by invoking the Muse:

“O lady”, he wrote in ‘Song’²³, “ You stood and your shadow was my place.”//“O lady, when the wind kissed you/ You made him music for you were a shaped shell./ I follow the waters and the wind still”.

And, in Crow: “O littleblood... / Sit on my finger, sing in my ear”²⁴.

The poems in Lupercal, he told Faas, were “invocations of the Goddess”²⁵; and his Hawk and Pike he described as “angels”, “composed of the glowing substances of the law” and “a way of focussing my natural world – these familiars of my boyhood – in a ‘divine’ dimension”²⁶.

At this time, too, he and Sylvia Plath clearly experimented with common folk-magic. But the summoning of spirits with the Ouija board left them, Hughes remembered later, with “... a befouled/ Feeling of jeopardy, a sense that days/ Would be needed now to cleanse us/ Of the pollution.”²⁷, and he came to reject such rough, uninformed dabbling as a debased and dangerous form of magic.

Hughes read the Bardo Thodol whilst he was at Cambridge. His reading, and a chance encounter at Yaddo Artists’ Colony in 1959, led him to explore the Buddhist Bardo in poems, plays like *The Wound*, stories and a libretto. At the same time, Alchemical texts, like Andreas’s fifteenth century work, *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, began to preoccupy him. But, turning back to the earliest Greek poets, he experimented with Orphic ritual in *Gaudete* before immersing himself in the *Alchemy of Cave Birds*.

Gaudete, when it was eventually published in 1977, included an Epilogue which was very different to the body of the play and which, together with the poems in *Orts* a year later, showed the influence of the Indian religious lyrics, called *vacanas*. In *vacanas*, the poet, in a sort of concentrated meditation, attempts to communicate directly with the divine. Some of Hughes’ poems at this time encapsulated, in the simple, direct speech of *vacanas*, the way in which he sought the Truth in Nature; and this plain, pared-down, direct style of communication had lasting effect on his work.

The Sanitary Inspector Looking always for light in our world’s darkness, he also began deliberately to choose the most unlovely of creatures in which to find a terrible beauty.

The fly, in 'Fly Inspects'²⁸, does all the things we regard as disgusting about flies. It wades "in the drains / Under the cow's tails, in the pig's eye corners" to "hoover up the rot, the stink and the goo". But that's its "job". That is the fly's function in the natural order of the world. And "Once he's cleaned up, he's a gem/ A freshly barbered Sultan, royally armoured/ In dusky rainbow metals./ A knight on a dark horse".

The most primitive, most ancient, ugliest of fishes, the Photostomias²⁹ (which have the Latin name *Ultimostomias mirabilis*, because of the miraculous bioluminescent light they bear), also embody a delicate natural balance which allows them to survive in the darkest and most inhospitable of places. These creatures, which are all predator, all jaws, nothing but "an illumination of fangs", are quite literally creatures of light. Their magical glow in the darkest depths of the Gulf reminded Hughes of "the tiger/ In his robe of flames". They, too, have a place and a function in the world of Nature; and they demonstrate a natural balance of darkness and light which seemed to Hughes to represent a promise, "a decalogue/ a rainbow", a sign that if we can regain our balance, and learn to live in harmony with Nature, we too can survive.

Considering his own place in Nature at this time, however, he was less optimistic: "The swallow – rebuilding –/ Collects the lot/ From the sow's wallow// But what I did only shifted the dust about/ And what crossed my mind/ Crossed into outer space."³⁰

The more Hughes came to see his role as that of a shamanic poet, however, the more he turned to serious spiritual disciplines such as Alchemy and Cabbala to achieve his magical poetic purpose. The language of both is the natural language of poets – symbol and metaphor. And in both, imagination, memory, and the ability to direct the will constantly and consistently towards the ultimate goal of spiritual wholeness is regarded as essential.

Cabbala, in particular, appealed to Hughes because he saw it as "the most formidably established and sophisticated, the most awesome in occult reputation, of all memory maps,...operated by techniques of meditation that at the very least [are] like divine prayer whilst at the highest they resemble communion with supernatural beings, if not with the Divine Emanation itself"³¹.

Cabbala, like Alchemy, however, leads us along a formidably difficult spiritual path. Not all of us have the courage and determination to follow it, as Hughes did: nor can everyone be a poet, shaman or magus, as he was. Nevertheless, each one of us can learn to use the magic of our will-power, our imagination and our memory to counteract the darkness within and around us.

We may begin, as Hughes suggested in his Introduction to *By Heart: 101 Poems to Remember*, by re-learning the old imaginative memory systems. But remembering, if we do it properly, is an awesome and terrifying experience, because it is, precisely, re-mem-bering – retrieving and putting back together the fragmented and scattered parts of a body in order to make it whole again.

This is what Isis did when she re-membered Osiris. And, as a goddess, she had the divine power to bring him back to life. We have only our imagination, but for Cabbalists (as for Plato) this is what links us with the divine, and if we have learned to use our visual imagination well, we can use it to re-create, re-vivify and re-animate the remembered body of our past. Psychologists recommend a similar practice for dealing with mental trauma, but for Cabbalists the most important reason for such remembering is to search, even in the darkest places, for the fragments of light which lie buried there. We need every glimmer of light in order to see more clearly, to understand our selves and our world more fully, and to regain that balance in Nature which is essential for our future.

This is what Hughes did when he brought together everything he knew about poetry and magic in *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers* and *Capriccio*. In each of these sequences, he used every technique he knew, and every aid to his visual imagination, to remember the past; remember those who had shared it with him, and to bring everything and everyone vividly to life again in his poems. He unearthed every fragment of memory from even the darkest, most deeply buried, most emotionally harrowing of places, and retrieved every remaining spark of light. He confronted the demons which haunted that darkness and acknowledged them, and understood their presence more fully. And he recreated the past in his poems in such a way that it lives now, for us in his poems, more whole and more balanced in every way.

20,000 people bought *Birthday Letters* when it was first published. Not all of them read it simply out of prurient interest. And many who read it right through discovered things which they identified with, and were moved by it – and changed by it. This is shamanic poetic magic at its most powerful. But Hughes certainly knew that if you believe in the power of magic, as he did, and acknowledge that belief in public, “You will be laughed at for your superstitions”.

Yet magic, or superstition, (whichever you choose to call it) has been an essential part of our imagination and an integral part of the stories we have created about our world ever since God created Adam. It is that part of our ancestral memory which links us most closely with the inexplicable wonders of Creation and with the whole “machinery of heaven³²”. And “Re-membering it”, as Hughes well knew by the end of his journey through the past in *Birthday Letters*,

“will make your palms sweat
The skin lift blistering, both your life-lines bleed”³³

.

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3. Graves, R. The White Goddess, Faber & Faber, London, 1961. p.22.
4. Sidney, Op.cit. p. 86-7.
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7. This is part of the title of a pamphlet by Stephen Gosson, The School of Abuse, to which Sidney is thought to have responded. Sidney, Op.cit, 'Introduction' by Watson. p. xliv.
8. Plato, Republic, edition by H. Stephens, 1578, p. 607.
9. Hughes, 'Myth and Education', Winter Pollen (WP), Faber, London, 1994. p. 136.
10. 'Egg-Head'. Hughes, Collected Poems (CP), Faber, London, 2003. p. 33.
11. 'Wodwo', CP 183.
12. 'Myth and Education', WP 146.
13. Hughes, 'The Environmental Revolution', WP 129.
14. 'Shakespeare and Occult Neoplatonism', WP 306.
15. Hughes explained this underlying purpose of Cave Birds in a detailed letter to Ann Skea in November 1984. The letter is published in part in Skea, Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest, University of New England Press, Armidale, 1994. pp. 41-2.
16. What Graves actually said in The White Goddess was that "the hair stands on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin crawls and a shiver runs down the spine" (op. cit. p. 24); which is more generally applicable than Houseman's test: "does the hair on one's chin bristle if one repeats it silently whilst shaving?" (Graves, Op.cit. p. 21).
17. In 1968, Hughes sent Lucas Myers a copy of magician Franz Bardon's Initiation Into Hermetics: a course of instruction of magical theory and practice (Ruggeberg,

Wuppertal, Germany, 1962). He inscribed it "To Lucas from the Crow. 13th Feb. 1968": (e-mail, L.Myers to A.Skea, 16 Feb. 2001). He also sent a copy to Emma Tennant in about 1976 (Walsh, J. The Independent, Saturday 17 April 1999), which suggests the lasting importance the exercises in this book had for him.

18. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1980. p.202.

19. Ibid. p. 202.

20. 'The Poetic Self', WP 270.

21. Sagar, *Op.cit.* p.4.

22. Faas, *Op.cit.* p.210.

23. CP 24.

24. CP 258.

25. Faas, *Op.cit.* p.199.

26. 'Poetry and Violence', WP 261-2.

27. 'Ouija' CP 1076.

28. 'Fly Inspects', CP 632-3.

29. 'Photostomias', CP 549-550. Photostomias ('deepsea loosejaws') are small, bioluminescent fish which belong to the Stomiidae family of Marine Vertebrates.

30. "I saw the swallow", CP 365

31. 'Shakespeare and occult Neoplatonism', WP 295-6.

32. 'October Salmon' CP 677-9. In 'Karlsbad Caverns' (CP 1106-9), too, where the bats are part of "the sun's machinery" and "the unfailing logic of the earth".

33. 'Superstitions', CP 1184. As usual, Hughes chose the images he used here with utmost care. The palms of the hands are, traditionally, the part of the human body through which divine spiritual and healing energies are channelled. And in the traditions of palmistry, the life-line on our left hand shows the potential we inherit from our parents and our earliest ancestors, whilst that on our right hand shows our personal and unique life-history. And the process of remembering did cause periodic outbreaks of eczema on Hughes's hands which did, at times, bleed.

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1. Introduction

'Fulbright Scholars', 'Caryatids (1)', 'Caryatids (2)'.

Includes The Path of the Hanged Man

MEM - 'Fidelity', 'Astringency', 'The Rag Rug', 'The Ventriloquist'.

2. The Path of The Fool

ALEPH - 'Fulbright Scholars', 'Chaucer', 'Isis', 'Dreamers'.

3. The Path of The Magician

BETH - 'Caryatids (2)', 'Ouija', 'Ephiphany', 'Fairy Tale'.

4. The Path of The High Priestess

GIMEL - 'Caryatids (1)', 'The Earthenware Head', 'The Gypsy', 'The Blackbird'.

5. The Path of The Empress

DALETH - 'Visit', 'Wuthering Heights', 'A Dream', 'Totem'.

6. The Path of The Emperor

HE - 'Sam', 'The Chipmunk', 'The Minotaur', 'Robbing Myself'.

7. The Path of The Hierophant

VAU - 'The Tender Place', 'Horoscope', 'The Pan', 'Blood and Innocence'.

8. The Path of The Lovers

ZAIN - 'St. Botolph's', 'Flounders', 'The Error', 'Costly Speech'.

9. The Path of The Chariot

CHETH - 'The Shot', 'The Blue Flannel Suit', 'The Lodger', 'The Inscription'.

10. The Path of Justice

TETH - 'Trophies', 'Child's Park', 'Daffodils', 'Night Ride on Ariel'.

11. The Path of The Hermit

YOD - '18 Rugby Street', '9 Willow Street', 'The Afterbirth', 'Telos'.

12. The Path of The Wheel of Fortune

KAPH - 'The Machine', 'The Literary Life', 'Setebos', 'Brasilia'.

13. The Path of Strength

LAMED - 'God Help the Wolf after Whom the Dogs Do Not Bark', 'The Bird', 'A Short Film', 'The Cast'.

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MEM - 'Fidelity', 'Astringency', 'The Rag Rug', 'The Ventriloquist'.

This Path was dealt with as part of the Introduction.

15. The Path of Death

NUN - 'Fate Playing', 'The Badlands', 'The Table', 'Life after Death'.

16. The Path of Temperance

SAMEKH - 'The Owl', 'Fishing Bridge', 'Apprehensions', 'The Hands'.

17. The Path of The Devil

A'AIN - 'A Pink Wool Knitted Dress', 'The 59th Bear', 'Dream Life', 'The Prism'.

18. The Path of The Tower

PE - 'Your Paris', 'Grand Canyon', 'Perfect Light', 'The God'.

19. The Path of The Star

TZADDI - 'You Hated Spain', 'Karlsbad Caverns', 'The Rabbit Catcher', 'Freedom of Speech'.

20. The Path of The Moon

QOPH - 'Moonwalk', 'Black Coat', 'Suttee', 'A Picture of Otto'.

21. The Path of The Sun

RESH - 'Drawing', 'Portraits', 'The Bee God', 'Fingers'.

22. The Path of Judgment

SHIN - 'Fever', 'Stubbing Wharfe', 'Being Christlike', 'The Dogs Are Eating Your Mother'.

23. The Path of The World

TAU - '55 Eltisley', 'Remission', 'The Beach', 'Red'.

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Birthday Letters: Poetry and Magic.
An analysis of Ted Hughes' use of Tarot and Cabbala in Birthday Letters.

1. Introduction

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalPoetry and Magic

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This paper is the first chapter of a detailed analysis of Ted Hughes' poetic sequence, Birthday Letters. It explores Hughes' use of Cabbala and Tarot in structuring Birthday

Letters and examines each poem in the sequence from this perspective. Useful background reading on Tarot and Cabbala is widely available on the internet but Colin Low's Notes on Kabbala is especially helpful.

Starting The Journey

'Fulbright Scholars', 'Caryatids (1)', 'Caryatids' (2).

"Is there any significance", a correspondent asked me, "in the fact that there are eighty-eight poems in Birthday Letters?". "None of which I am aware", I replied, "But, since Ted does structure his poetic sequences very carefully, I would not rule it out".

I thought no more about this, because I was preoccupied with the idea that the Birthday Letters were Ted's *Eroici Furori* – a sequence of passionate love poems such as were considered to be the crowning achievement of a Renaissance magus like Giordano Bruno, with whose work Ted was very familiar. Love, for Renaissance Hermeticists and for Platonic Neoplatonists like Bruno, was "the living virtue in all things, which the magician intercepts and which leads him from the lower things to the supercelestial realm by divine furor¹. It was a means of understanding, ordering and, ultimately, influencing things in our world. Bruno published *De gli Eroici Furori* in England in 1586, but it is a cryptic text full of magical symbolism, and very different to Birthday Letters. It was dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney, whose English love poetry is, however, similar in some ways to Ted's and has itself been attributed (although contentiously) to the inspiration of divine furor.

Ted's belief in the primacy of the imagination as an instrument for reaching the truth was exactly that of Sidney and the other members of the so-called "Areopagus" who befriended Bruno on his visit to England. And his preface to *By Heart: 101 Poems to Remember* (Faber, 1997) sets out exactly the sort of mnemonic techniques for training the imagination that they had learned from the work of Renaissance Hermeticists like Marsilio Ficino. His belief in poetry as "magical" and as "one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen"²; his knowledge of the work of Renaissance figures like Bruno, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola (as evidenced in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, (Faber, 1992); his sustained, careful and detailed use of the techniques, processes and beliefs of alchemy in *Cave Birds*, *Remains of Elmet* and *River*; and his acknowledged use of meditation and astrology, all point to his lifelong interest in using magic in his work. None of this, however, threw any light on Birthday Letters until I read about the way in which poets like Sidney, Fulke Greville, Marlow, Milton, Donne and, later, even Dryden, adopted Cabbalistic number theory in the structure and content of their poems. The work by Alastair Fowler in revealing this kind of structuring has been of major importance, and it was whilst reading his work on Spencer³ that I suddenly realised the possible relationship between Cabbala and the eighty-eight poems in Birthday Letters.

Cabbala, in its ancient and traditional form, is the knowledge of occult number theory in the Bible. It is also a mystical and magical discipline by means of which the Cabbalist

may understand our world and all its energies and use them to reintegrate disparate elements – to create harmony and heal ills. This is the Great Work, and the individual seeking to undertake this work must begin with the self.

Cabbala is based on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Sephirith picture These letters are arranged on interconnecting pathways on a Sephirothic Tree (a tree of life) on which there are ten Sephiroth – ten points at which the divine energies enter our world, transmitted as a lightning flash from the Divine Source. And, in Ted's own words: "Everything in the universe, attached to its symbol, can be given its proper place on the Tree... So the Tree becomes a means of ordering the psyche by internalizing the knowable universe as a stairway to God" (SGCB 20-1).

Trees on Sephirith picture Those who seek to order the psyche and climb the stairway to God in this way, follow The Path of Wisdom (also known as "The Path of the Serpent") along the Tree's twenty-two interconnected pathways, through four overlapping worlds: Atziluth (the World of emanation, archetypes and (in Jungian terms) the psyche; Briah, the World of the intellect, the possibility of creation, the collective subconscious; Yetzirah, the World of synthesis, formation, the individual subconscious; and Assiah, the world of making, the earthy, material world of consciousness. William Blake's four worlds of Eden, Beulah, Generation and Ulro "derive from the same tradition"⁴. The twenty-two letters of the Cabbalistic alphabet in these four worlds make eighty-eight pathways along which the Cabbalist makes the questing journey. And, from the time of the Renaissance, the cards of the Tarot pack (especially the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana) have been used as a mnemonic for the pathways of this Cabbalistic quest.

If all this seems to be a long way from poetry, then I can only say that magic is an art, and it is an art in which Ted was very interested. He often described poetry as a magical shamanic journey undertaken to obtain some healing energies needed in our world, and he constantly sought ways to use the imagination to reintegrate our inner and outer worlds. One might also apply to Ted some of his own observations about Shakespeare: "Without assuming that [he] was a devout Occult Neoplatonist [or Cabbalist]....one can suppose that out of this vast complex of archaic, magical, religious ideas and methods, the following items caught his attention: ...The idea of a syncretic mythology....The idea of these images as internally structured, precisely folded, multiple meanings....The idea of meditation as a conjuring by ritual magic of hallucinatory figures – with whom conversations can be held" (SGCB 32-3). All of these ideas are very relevant to Birthday Letters.

The question then, for me, was whether Ted did use Cabbala, and in particular the imagery of the Tarot, to structure the sequence of poems in Birthday Letters and, if so, whether this offers us a different perspective on the work. I began my investigation of these questions sceptically, knowing the richness and range of Ted's imagination and very aware that I might easily impose the structure for which I was searching. But, for many reasons, not least the closeness and consistency with which the poems match the cards and embody the Sephirothic emanations, I now have no doubt that such a

structure exists. (See Table 1 for a full list of these correspondences).

Each episode of the story – “Your story. My story” – in Birthday Letters is a stage on the path at which something - some pattern from the past – is (often quite literally) captured in a photograph, film, picture or mental image and brought into the present to be meditated on, questioned, illuminated and re-created in a poem. For Ted, who believed in the magical power of poetry and the summoning power of symbols, this was a dangerous process, as well as being psychologically harrowing. Cabbala, if nothing else, provided him with a protective structure within which to negotiate with the energies and to conjure into being the people and events of his past.

The Cabbalistic journey begins with the first manifestation of form, the point, in which every potential exists. It is everything and nothing; the closed and endless circle; zero; the aleph of the Hebrew alphabet. For the neophyte Cabbalist or magician, it is the image of The Fool in the Tarot pack. Fool card Here is the “imbecile innocent” of Cave Birds (‘In these fading moments...’ CB 20), stepping off blindly on his journey towards knowledge and enlightenment with the baggage of his past life on his back and the dog of materialism and worldly convention snapping at his heels. The very title of the first poem in Birthday Letters embodies all these things (‘Fulbright Scholars’ BL 3). Here are “Scholars”, Sylvia amongst them, about to embark on the search for knowledge in a strange land. The accumulated Alphas of their past lives have earned them a place on this path, and they are “Ful – bright” like the zero of the sun. They have their luggage with them, literally and metaphorically. In the photograph, as in the first manifestation of matter, everything is still possible.

Ted, too, is an innocent, “dumbfounded” by his “ignorance of the simplest things” and confessing (like the neophyte magician making the ritual negative confession at the start of the journey) that he lacks memory, knowledge and direction. In Cabbalistic terms, at the apex of the Tree is Kether, the Crown, the Monad, the number 1, the planted seed from which all else grows. This is also the Garden of Eden, and just as Adam’s bite of the apple from the Tree of Knowledge brought him knowledge of his nakedness, so Ted’s first taste of a fresh peach brings self-consciousness.

Consciousness, Force and Form, the first three Sephiroth on the Tree, are the fundamental aspects of the divine as manifest in all creation and from them comes all change in the natural world and in the inner world of the Cabbalist. Temple picture

Chokmah, Sephira number 2, and Binah, Sephira number 3, form the base of this triangle of supernal energies. Chokmah and Binah each occupy the summit of one of the two pillars of Mercy and Justice on and between which all ten Sephiroth of the Tree are positioned. Chokmah, on the right-hand pillar of Mercy, is also known as Abba, the All Father, Raw Energy: Binah, on the left-hand pillar of Justice, is known as Aima, the All Mother, Capacity to take form.

Given this graphic arrangement, it is interesting to note that the title of both the second and third poems in Birthday Letters (BL 4-6) is ‘Caryatids’ (the name of carved female

figures which form pillars supporting the portico of a Greek temple) and that in both the hardback and the paperback editions of the book these poems, perhaps fortuitously, stand side-by-side, pillar-like, on opposing pages.

Priestess cardAlso, the poem on the left embodies female energies: the caryatids are “friable” and “frail-looking” (“each body” in Sylvia’s poem, to which Ted refers, is “a virgin vase”), yet they are strong enough to bear a “falling heaven of granite”. In the Tarot, the related card is that of The High Priestess, who represents Artemis, the huntress, (caryatids are named after the women of Caryae who worshipped Artemis) and also Isis, Diana and other moon-goddesses of potential fertility. Which suggests not only a literal answer to Ted’s opening question in ‘Caryatids (1)’, “What were those caryatids bearing?”, but also that they are bearers of the omen which he failed to see.

‘Caryatids (2)’, the poem on the right, embodies raw male energies, “frivolous as faithless”, “stupid with confidence”, “careless”, carousing and destructive, focussed only on the present, the “real World and self”. Just such energies belong to The Magician, The Juggler, Hermes/Mercury, whose Tarot card is associated with the duad Chokmah. Magus cardHe can be dexterous and cunning, creative and destructive, magus or trickster. He, too, like the protagonist of Ted’s poem, wears “playclothes”, “tests every role for laughs”, yet is able to spark connections “through bustling atmospherics”.

Sylvia’s caryatid poem was meant to catch the attention of Ted and his poet friends, which it did. But they thought it exemplified form without energy (just as Binah does) and disliked it. In Ted’s view it was “thin and brittle”, “cold”, “like the theorem of a trap, a deadfall”. The irony of this was that the trap caught both Ted and Sylvia.

In these first three poems, as nowhere else in Birthday Letters, Ted deals directly with the Sephiroth rather than with the paths between them. This is appropriate, because at this level – that of the first three divine emanations in the highest, Atziluthic, world – the energies are nearest to the Source and are of equal importance. It is also appropriate, because in all the rituals associated with Cabbalistic journeys, such as those of the Order of The Golden Dawn (of which Yeats was once a prominent member), the Neophyte is brought to the ‘Pillars of Solomon/Hermes/Seth’ beyond which lies the gate to ‘The Hall of Truth’. At this stage in Birthday Letters, Ted has brought himself and Sylvia to this gateway. Together they will begin the journey but, until their marriage, their paths run parallel and are joined only at times, as fate decrees.

The Path of the The Hanged Man – Mem
Mem pathHanged Man card
Tarot card 12. Tree path 13.
Joining Sephira 5 (Gevurah)and 8 (Hod)

‘Fidelity’, ‘Astringency’, ‘The Rag Rug’, ‘The Ventriloquist’

Clearly, it is not possible for me to trace the Cabbalistic pattern of this journey poem by poem through Birthday Letters in this short paper. What I will do, instead, is look at four poems which represent the same path in each of the four overlapping Worlds. The path I have chosen is that of the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Mem, which is symbolised by water and is represented in the Tarot by card 12, The Hanged Man. For the sake of simplicity, too, I will concentrate on the Tarot, which is, as I have already mentioned, a mnemonic device for remembering the complex theory of Cabbala, and, as such, it relies on vivid images and rich mythological associations.

The image on the card of The Hanged Man was identified in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*⁵ as Attis, the Dying God on the Tree of Life. It is a symbol of sacrifice, death and rebirth, an overturning of the world, a time for radical change on the path. Mem, described by Cabbalists as "between the Waters above and the Waters beneath", is also a path of transition.

The Birthday Letters poem related to the path of Mem and The Hanged Man in the first, Atziluthic, world of archetypes and first emanations is 'Fidelity' (BL 28), and almost its first words are – "I was just hanging around". Here is Ted, "afloat on the morning tide", "gutted", "free", suspended:

...I think of it

As a kind of time that cannot pass.

That I have never used, so still possess.

At this stage of the Cabbalistic journey, worldly things have been left behind and the aspirant is in a state of suspension and must prove him or herself worthy of continuing along the path. Like the Grail-quest Knight, some trial must be passed, some choice or sacrifice made.

Only a short time earlier, Ted was "playing at friendship", "frivolous as faithless". The old life had to end, just as Dionysus had to perish to be reborn as Iacchus. Already Ted has left behind the baggage of his first twenty-five years. All he has is "a bare mattress, on bare boards, in a bare room" and his notebook. Now, every night in this bare, top room, he encounters "a lovely girl" and, just as the Grail-quest Knight (Gawain, in particular) was tested in his encounters with the amorous lady in the mysterious castle, so Ted's "fidelity" to Sylvia is tested. Images of "knighthood", "holy law", "a priestess", "nakedness" and chaste "sisterly comforting" all reinforce this parallel. Ted makes a choice, and even the second, "wilder", "shameless gap-tooth", plump and pretty girl does not break his chivalrous resolve to "keep the meaning of my words / Solid with the world we were making".

Significantly, it was the breaking of faith which was the issue here not sexual gratification, for in Cabbala sex is not a sin. So, each girl – one naked and sisterly, the other naked in her desire to get him "inside her" – is sacrificed, "laid", like a "sinless

child", under the threshold of Ted's and Sylvia's future.

The second poem on the path of Mem and The Hanged Man is 'Astringency' (BL 80). Now, Ted's and Sylvia's paths are combined. They are no longer in the Atziluthic world of archetypes but in the lower, watery, mutable World of Briah, the world of intellect and abstract creation.

In 'Astringency', the natural energies, like the River Charles, seem frozen and everything is suspended. Ted strolls "slackly", and he and Sylvia are "Together, silent, thinking of nothing". The word 'astringency' was for years, as Ted tells us, a cant, insincere, catchword but it also means "the drawing together of organic tissues" (OED), a process by which healing is promoted. In the poem, which is full of images of sickness and distress, Ted draws together fragments of free, healthy energy (like the goldfish) and the "toxic" world of "Agrochemicals", air polluted by iron-smelting, and "Lit.Crit" – all the result of intellectual intervention in a natural, creative process. He and Sylvia are "Right there on the edge" of this world, standing "on" America, rather than immersed in it's culture, watching the "lariat" noose of "each small, tired wave" wash over "a nipple of rock", as if these murky, poisoned waters are threatening their own mother.

In their lives at this time, too, they were on the edge. They had left behind the rational, predictable path of jobs and academia and they were not yet committed to the literary life of Boston. "A life of doing nothing is death", Sylvia wrote in her journal on August 2nd, 1958, and she swung between elation and depression: "the strangling noose of worry, of hysteria, paralysis..."⁶ was ever present. In the true spirit of Briah they were "writing, consolidating our splayed selves"⁷: discovering identity and voice.

Amongst the other organic energies brought together in the poem, are the human energies, rational and instinctive. In Sylvia, if not in Ted, rationality is "the censor", "the night hands", "the snare" which silences her instinctive energies and traps "all that teeming population" of imaginative metaphors, to hang them, tortured, in her poems (another image of suspension). Only once does Ted hear an instinctive metaphor escape in her speech. But, like the goldfish, this "Brainstorm of the odds" shows that the situation is not hopeless, the natural energies are still strong and "frisky" and choice still exists.

No sacrifices are mentioned in the poem, but the choice Ted and Sylvia make (as the very next poem in Birthday Letters shows) is to follow instinct, rather than logic, and to keep faith with the trust each has placed in poetry and its paramount importance in their shared future.

Below the World of Briah, but connected to it, is the World of Yetzirah, a world of syntheses and formation in which poetry, music, literature, art, law and all other real but intangible patterns exist and are shaped by the individual subconscious.

'The Rag Rug' (BL 135), (which is the poem on the Hanged Man path in this Yetziratic World) does not, on first reading seem to be about suspension, choice or sacrifice, as

the other poems were. But it is full of Cabbalistic symbolism, especially in the snake energies which coil and sway and pour through the poem. Sylvia's "motley viper", a serpent which seems "to pull something out of [her] like some tapeworm of the psyche" and is dragged, like her own "entrails, out through [her] navel", and Ted's great golden snake, shaken awake by an inversion of Ted's dream world and lifting "its head from a well in the middle of the house", are both superb images of subconscious energies. They are also energies which are as dangerous and mysterious as The Path of Wisdom (which is itself The Path of the Serpent) is for those who travel it. And they are linked in the poem with some deep "knowledge" which will alter Sylvia's "blood" and Ted's "nerves and brain" and lie "coiled between" them like the rag rug, dividing them from each other.

Hanged Man imagery is there in the poem, too. It is there in the doubleness which Ted himself weaves into the poem so that the rag rug becomes a symbolic interface between two worlds, the earth world of "venous blood", "the grave", malediction and death, and the sky world of the "serpent's jumbled rainbow", of "lightnings", sunny "daffodil yellow", happiness and birth. At this interface, Ted and Sylvia are "lifted", "freed" by the physical act of creation. Sylvia, plaiting the rug and "creating the serpent" soothes Ted with her calm industry, and Ted, lulls her with his voice, "like a snake-charmer", reading books which are, themselves, about interfaces where dark, subconscious energies enter the world.

The mood of suspension, of "breath-held camera moments", of shared beauty and happiness is strong in the poem, but so, too, is the fragility of this world, the sense of impending, irreversible, division and change. And the poem lies at a moment of change in the Birthday Letters sequence and in the story which it tells.

In my reading of the poem, the creation of the rag rug is a metaphor for the creative gestation which was going on in Sylvia in the early months of 1962, a process in which Ted, himself was "pushed out and away". Until then, in spite of all their differences, Ted and Sylvia had worked together. But at the heart of this poem, following the moment of suspension and beauty, are Sylvia's "furies" ("bled into the rug" and "confided to whoever" in her diary), followed by Ted's images of birth and separation. Sylvia seems driven by this new knowledge she has "unearthed" to separate herself from Ted – to do what she had described once in her journal in a burst of fury at Ted: "... I won't bother showing him the story of Sweetie Pie I've done, keep the viper out of the household and send it out on its own"⁸. It is not clear whether the viper, at the time of that particular entry, was Ted or the story she had written.

In April 1962, according to Ted in 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals'⁹, Sylvia achieved "this cool, light, very beautiful moment of mastery, that enabled her to take the next step... [then] she started on a poem about a giant wych elm that overshadowed the yard of her home... And at once the Ariel voice emerged in full, out of the tree.". The poem to which Ted refers is 'Elm'¹⁰. And the poem immediately after 'The Rag Rug', which represents the next step on the journey in Birthday Letters, describes how Sylvia divined new inspiration for her writing "in the elm", although here it is the elm table Ted made for her

(‘The Table’ BL 138)11.

And there are sacrifices here, too. ‘The Rag Rug’ ends with an image of the end of Ted’s and Sylvia’s shared Eden. The rag rug itself, and the inspiration and knowledge which the process of gestation and birth achieved, survived this ending but, from this point on, Sylvia followed her path alone and Ted “sleepwalked” (‘The Table’, BL 138) after her.

In ‘The Ventriloquist’ (BL 181), the poem on The Hanged Man path in the World of Assiah, sacrifice is total. Assiah is the world of making, where all that has been prepared for and formed in the other Worlds becomes real and present. It is the lowest, earth-bound World, furthest from the Source and nearest to the dark Underworld. ‘The Ventriloquist’ is full of doubleness, it encapsulates all that has happened so far in the journey and it ends with Sylvia’s most terrible choice and sacrifice – her death.

In my reading of this poem, Sylvia is the ventriloquist of the poem’s title, and Ariel is her “doll”. Ariel was a magnificent and terrifying creation, strong, angry and destructive, beautiful but flawed like everything in the World of Assiah. It was Ariel’s voice that Sylvia had worked so hard to find and which spoke so clearly in the poems she wrote in the last months of her life.

And Ariel has accompanied Ted and Sylvia on their journey through Birthday Letters. Ariel was the “humanoid, raggedy shadow” which appeared in the portrait painted of Sylvia at Yaddo (‘Portraits’, BL 104) but she has now grown strong and independent. Hers was the voice “which cried out in [your] sleep” in ‘Fairy Tale’ (BL 159) and which Sylvia did not recognise as her own. And Ariel was the “prisoner in the dungeon” who Sylvia fed “through the keyhole” in ‘The Blackbird’ (BL 162), and the “Guardian Angel” into whose bosom Sylvia “crept for safety” but who turned out to be her “Demon Slave”, and “devoured” her.

‘The Ventriloquist’ begins with the bodily fall into sex, love and marriage which, in Birthday Letters was also Ted’s and Sylvia’s fall into the Abyss from the top of the Sephirothic Tree at the start of their questing journey. Whilst Sylvia wept and clung to Ted through the “thorny wood” and the “river’s freeze” of the journey which was also their marriage, her other, destructive, self put “Mummy” on show as “The Kraken” in The Bell Jar and screamed in her poems that “Daddy was no good” and that Ted “was with a whore”. Finally, it is this second self, which Sylvia had sought out and nurtured, which kills her.

This was the ultimate self-sacrifice, the ultimate destructive revenge by the “doll” on the stars which had guided Sylvia towards her creation. In Cabbalistic terms, it was not “Justice” (note the capital given to this word in the poem) but the result of an unbalanced use of the severe energies of the Pillar of Justice, which should have been tempered by those of the Pillar of Mercy. As Portia so rightly tells Shylock in The Merchant of Venice, “earthly powers do then show likest God’s when mercy seasons justice”.

For Sylvia, this was the end of her journey. The re-birth which, in Cabbalistic terms, should have followed her sacrifice was no longer possible. Ted's world, too, was overturned. In spirit, he too was plunged into darkness and it was a long time before he began, again, his journey towards the Source.

But Birthday Letters does not end with 'The Ventriloquist'. Cabbala, like alchemy, works at three levels: the conscious, story-telling, level; the metaphorical level at which images and symbols work on the subconscious and the spiritual message is understood; and the practical level of applied processes and rituals. In the remaining Birthday Letters poems, Ted completes the new journey which he began when he started the imaginative processes and rituals needed to conjure past events and re-create them in his work. The final poems are all aspects of life after death, which is also the title of the poem following 'The Ventriloquist'. They tell of the effects of Sylvia's death on Ted and her children; of the myths and stories which Ted created because of it; and of the industry which grew up around her story and her work. They tell, too, of the characteristics and skills Frieda and Nicholas inherited from her and of Ted's memories of her, which, like the "flawless crystal" of her "seer's vision-stone", encompass both ecstasy and horror.

In 'The Dogs are Eating your Mother'(BL 195), Sylvia's children and we, the readers of the poem, are told to imagine her journey out of the underworld and on towards the sun, to "think her better". And in the final poem, 'Red' (BL 197) Ted lays to rest the ghost of Sylvia which he has conjured back into life in the poems by recombining the red and the blue colours which reflected her blood and her spirit, and sealing this journey's end with the symbol of kindly caresses which he has used in the poem – a blue jewel.

AFTERWORD

For Ted, Birthday Letters brought, he said, "a sense of inner liberation, a huge sudden possibility of new inner experience. Quite strange."¹² His wife, Carol, wrote¹³ that "he was renewed after publishing them". For me, following Ted's footsteps through Birthday Letters along some well-trodden Cabbalistic pathways has been an enlightening and magical experience. But it is the nature of Cabbala that every person must make the journey for themselves. Although we may follow the same paths, what I learn on my journey is likely to be quite different to what you would learn on yours. So, in the end, all anyone can offer as a guide are a few unsteady footprints in the mud and the suggestion of sights you might see along the way.

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5. J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Macmillan, London, 1974
6. Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, Ballantyne, NY, 1982, July 27, 1958.
7. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, Sept. 27, 1958.
8. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, May 20, 1959. This particular entry is amongst others made in 1959 (January 27, 28, May 18, 20, 31) which record Sylvia's first experiences with rug-braiding. On Jan.27, she records her intention that the rug will be something to help her to assert her will: "I will begin to make a rug today. To step on". On Jan. 28, she describes her "immense pleasure" in making something by hand; and on May 20, after a fight with Ted, she records her use of rug-braiding to release her anger: "It will not be a prayer rug but an anger rug". It is interesting to note that the colours Sylvia describes using in 1959 are not those which Ted describes in the poem. Either Sylvia was making another rug in 1961, or Ted has transposed the rug-braiding activity and altered the details for this poem.
9. Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, Faber and Faber, London, 1994, 187-8.
10. *Sylvia Plath: Collected Poems*, Faber and Faber, London, 1981, 192-3.
11. At the time of the events in the poem, Ted and Sylvia were living in Devon in the house with the well "beneath its slab in the middle" and the worn threshold. It was 1962, Nicholas had been born in January and Sylvia's mother had visited them from late June to mid August. But the table which Ted describes in 'The Table', the poem which follows 'The Rag Rug' in *Birthday Letters*, had been made for Sylvia in September the previous year (*Letters Home*, Sept. 15, 27, 1961). Sylvia's poem 'Elm', in which Ted suggests the Ariel voice first appeared, was written in April 1962. So, the chronology of the poems does not follow that of actual events here but is consistent with the order of the pathways on the Sephirothic Tree
12. Ted Hughes' letter read at the Whitbread Book of the Year Awards Jan. 1999
13. Carol Hughes in a letter to AS. Dec. 1999.

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The Path of the Fool – Aleph

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Joining Sephiroth 1(Kether) and 2(Chokmah)

'Fulbright Scholars', 'Chaucer', 'Isis', 'Dreamers'

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The Fool in Atziluth, as we have already seen, was Ted, who in 'Fulbright Scholars' was wandering aimlessly, "where was it, in the Strand?". The Strand, appropriately, is the site of an ancient riverside beach where boats were once literally stranded whilst their passengers continued their journeys into London on foot. There, ready for new adventures, Ted was distracted by a display of news photographs. He scanned the picture of newly arrived Fulbright scholars "wondering which of them [he] might meet" and noting "particularly the girls". And his memory of all this was linked with his first taste of a fresh peach and the dawning, "dumbfound[ing]" knowledge of his own "ignorance of the simplest things".

The Fool in Atziluth was also Sylvia, one of the scholars poised at the start of a new adventure in a new land.

So this was Aleph, October 1955, the start of it all. Both Ted and Sylvia, like Atziluthic archetypes, were young and fresh, open to new experiences and poised to begin their shared journey: their shared story. This poem, too, is Aleph. It is the "Once upon a time" of their story, and everything in it lives in the unreal light of memory and fable, and in the imagination of the poet and the reader. This was the Golden Age, the age of youth, freedom and innocence in which everything seemed possible.

The Fool in Briah, however, has already fallen from this protean state and is already in the process of creating a new self and a new life for that self. For Ted and Sylvia, this was a joint enterprise, as all their writing at this time showed. Traversing the twenty-two paths of the Atziluthic World, as the poems from 'Fulbright Scholars' (BL 3) to '55 Eltisley Avenue' (BL 49) relate, they had met, fallen in love, married and moved into their first home in Cambridge. There, in November 1966, they entered a world of "rainbow darkness" in which "hand-in-hand" they would begin their new life together.

So begins the journey along the paths of Briah. In Briah's watery, abstract world, where the conditions for creation are learned and the creative elements are assembled ready for use, The Fool steps onto the first path which moves from the Crown of the Cabbalistic Tree, Sephira 1 (Kether) towards Wisdom, Sephira 2 (Chokmah). On this, the Aleph path, the "Original Teacher's Illumination" (Crowley) is invoked by the Cabbalistic quester and explored. The Birthday Letters poem, at this point, is 'Chaucer' (BL 51). And it is a wonderfully Fool-ish poem.

Sylvia, ecstatically inspired by "pure spirit", perches precariously on a country stile and recites to a fool's circle of "enthralled" (a very precise magician's word) cows. These are her "imagined audience" – a jostling, awed, snorting ring of dumb (foolish) animals to whom she imparts the springtime evoked by her teacher, Chaucer, in The Canterbury Tales. She follows this with his description of "her favourite character in all literature" (SPLH April 8, 1957), the Wife of Bath, who is also a marvellously foolish creature in the ironic eyes of Chaucer's narrator.

Ted, in this innocent and carefree scene, is so filled with the shared ecstasy and the springtime intoxication of it, that all other memories, then and as he recreated it in his poem, "had to go back into oblivion". And this image of simultaneous fullness and emptiness is exactly the Fool's Tarot number, zero, which contains both everything and nothing.

Ted too, reaches in this poem for illumination from one of his original teachers. Chaucer, who in the earlier poem 'St. Botolph's' (BL 14) is "our Chaucer", honoured by both Ted and Sylvia, here provides Ted with the words with which to begin a magical recreation of the "champagne ecstasy" of an April day. This is a time at which he and Sylvia are stepping out, like Chaucer's pilgrims, along new paths and this is the poem in which Ted begins to imaginatively re-create this next stage of the Cabbalistic journey.

On the paths of the Briatic World, Ted and Sylvia experiment and test themselves, and learn from their varied experiences. In reality, this time extended from November 1956 to February 1960. Sylvia completed her studies at Cambridge and they then moved to America. There they taught at respected academic establishments but found that teaching hindered rather than helped their creative lives. So, they saved their money and gave up their safe jobs in order to write. In Boston for a year they sampled the literary life, and Sylvia sought professional help from a psychologist for her depressions, her writing block and her panics. But America, it seems, depressed Ted (SPJ 26 Dec. 1958) and at this time they began to plan their move to England (SPJ 28 Jan. 1959). First, they travelled around America and Canada, testing one of many "thresholds" ('Fishing Bridge' BL 87), "looking for you", as Ted says of Sylvia in 'The Badlands' (BL 82). To no avail. So, after a brief spell at the artists' colony of Yaddo and with all their plans (the Yetziritic patterns which now existed in their minds) now ready to be implemented, they moved to England.

In the Yetziritic World, the possibility of creation which the quester has gained by traversing the paths of Atziluth and Briah is converted into something which has shape,

as a pattern has shape, but which is not yet solid and tangible. For the poet, this intangible pattern is a certainty of what poetry is, what it does and how to go about creating it. It is the store of knowledge from which the poet writes and which comprises all the tools of a poet's art. But it is not yet a fixed, consistent, manifest 'voice' crystallised in individual poems. On the Yetziritic pathways, questers begin to bring about their goals - to make them solid and tangible.

In Birthday Letters, the poem which represents The Fool in the World of Yetzirah is 'Isis' (BL 111). At first reading it seems an unlikely 'Fool' poem but there are elements of it which fit the pattern exactly. Above all, it is about birth and new beginnings. Ted emphasises this in the first line by recalling an earlier morning of freedom and anticipation in their lives, and he uses 'America' realistically and (as he constantly does in Birthday Letters) as a symbol of hope – a Promised Land.

Ted and Sylvia, now, are in England beginning their creative lives again as poets and, in this poem, as parents. Once again, certain "baggage" has been put behind them. Sylvia, in her Boston sessions with psychologist, Ruth Beuscher, has confronted her demons and "dealt with Death". And her visit to her father's grave in Winthrop (SPJ 9 March and 23 April 1959) at that time allowed her to "come to an agreement finally" with "my own father – the buried male-muse & god-creator" (SPJ 11 May 1958) and with her desires and fears about pregnancy (SPJ 13 Dec. 1958 and 13 June 1959).

Yet as the tarot Fool carries his baggage slung on a stick over his shoulder as he steps blithely forward, the "baggage" of past experience is never completely left behind. Sylvia has lightened her heaviest, psychological, baggage (which became Ted's burden, too, when they married) but it seems to him, as he writes this poem, that "Death" may still have been with them "hidden", "waiting for your habits / To come back and remember him". What certainly was with them, like their "lightest bit of luggage" on the journey, was their unborn child. But the subject of this phrase, as it is positioned in the poem, is ambiguous, for the poem begins with the name of Isis, and she, too, "started with [them]" as part of their mental "luggage".

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In reality, Sylvia's midwife was a small Indian woman (SPLH 1 April 1960), the "fairy godmother" Ted describes in the poem 'Remission' (BL 109). Now, in this next poem in the sequence, she becomes a priestess of Black Isis and Ted uses her to magically summon the Goddess, ritually invoking Isis by her full magical name, Polymorphous Daemon Magnae Deorum Matris, and welcoming her into the poem with the music of voice and sistrum. This is powerful and dangerous magic which usually only an adept will attempt, and he takes care to contain her powers within the poem, giving her a body "to create with" and the "soft mask" of a human face which, with vivid realism, is both "triumphant" and "grotesque" on "the bed of birth".

Sylvia, herself, at this moment of birth in the poem, becomes Isis: embodying the Goddess, the Enchantress, Great Mother, bloody and fecund vehicle of life. The poem brims with her exhilaration and exultance, just as the birth really did fill Sylvia with these energies (SPLH Note: 1 April 1960). And Life is triumphant. A mother, a newborn child and a father (here present as the poet), the three essential elements for continuous regeneration, are here, as they were then, ecstatically linked in the promise which new life brings.

By giving birth, Sylvia's triumph over Death was something quite apart from her battle against the depressions caused by her father's death and her own struggles against writing blocks and "poetic death". It was a different kind of triumph, expressing a different aspect of the Goddesses powers. But summoned into the poem by Ted, Isis as Enchantress also provides poetic inspiration to support his magic and this poem brings Sylvia vividly to life.

Sadly, the promise and the new optimism with which Ted and Sylvia here began their journey along the Yetziritic paths was not to last. Death had been only temporarily defeated and, although Sylvia "had hidden him / From [herself] and deceived even Life", she had not conquered him. So, by the time Ted and Sylvia reach the lower, material World of Assiah, their difficulties have still not been resolved and they are unprepared for challenges which face them. Although their individual determination to achieve direct access to the sources of their creative inspiration and to live their lives as poets has not diminished, their paths have begun to diverge. Isis, too, whilst still their teacher and inspiration, takes on a far more dangerous aspect in this lower World, for her power is most often present here in the form of Hecate, Kali, Lilith and other dark goddesses of the Underworld which is so close below the World of Assiah.

'Dreamers' (BL 157), which is the poem which represents the path of The Fool in the World of Assiah, describes events which began in August 1961, and it marks a less happy beginning. Choices already made and experience gathered along the paths already travelled, have brought the questers to this next path with patterns of thought and behaviour ready to be crystalized. And because Assiah is the world of crystalization, a place of fixed, earth-bound, material things, and closer to the Underworld than to the Divine Source, it is a world of masks and hollow values in which the journey is less free. Fate holds stronger sway. And the Fool displays more characteristics of the Trickster - is more reckless and more subject to the instinctive, earthy, animal energies. He still carries his staff, or wand, over his shoulder and still has magical, psychic powers, but he is less able to change things. He is altogether more worldly-foolish - more full of folly.

All three people in 'Dreamers' are foolish and naïve, fascinated and "helpless" as if in an opiate dream. It is not that they have no freedom, but that they are beginning this journey in a weak, vulnerable, emotional state, too easily swayed by their desires, too ready to be made the "puppets" of Fate. It is this weakness, which allows Fate to sniff them out and "assemble" them for "its experiment".

Assia Wevill is the third helpless dreamer in this poem. In September, 1961, she and her husband had taken over the London flat in which Sylvia and Ted had been living before they bought Court Green. Sylvia and Ted had been so drawn to them that they had destroyed a cheque from another man in order to let them have the flat (SPLH 13 Aug. 1961), and in May, 1962, Sylvia invited this “nice young Canadian poet and his very attractive, intelligent wife” down to Devon for the weekend (SPLH 14 May 1962).

Assia Guttman, whose mother was German and father a Russian Jew, had been born in Berlin in 1927 and had lived in the German Colony in Palestine during the war. She spoke Russian, German and English, and a little Hebrew “survived on bats and spiders / In the guerilla priest-hole / Under [her] tongue” (‘Shibboleth’, *Capriccio*, Gehenna, 1990). Sylvia was “fascinated” by her accent and her history and her erotic, exotic “many blooded beauty”. It was almost as if she were Sylvia’s “dream-self”: the shadowy double who crept into the nightmare fantasies of poems like ‘Lady Lazarus’ (SPCP 244).

Sylvia, in ‘Dreamers’, “cultivated her”, but was wary of this “Lilith of abortions” who touched her children with “tiger-painted nails”. This is a chilling image, for Lilith, in Jewish legend, was the first wife of Adam who, banished and demonised, was jealous of Eve’s children and became their devourer. Lilith was made with Adam from dust and was his equal in every way but, refusing to submit to his will, she invoked the Name of God in order to escape. For this invocation, she was banished. Then, because Adam had no mate, God took one of Adam’s ribs and created Eve – made from him and therefore part of him and subject to his will. Lilith, meanwhile, conceived her own demonic children by coupling with men in their sleep, provoking erotic nightmares and nocturnal emission.

Yet there is another aspect to Lilith which the Cabbalists accept. She, who was created alongside Adam and from the same substance, is part of our humanity. It is we who, by rejecting her and demonising her, have made her dangerous and destructive. Cabbalists believe that we must learn to recognise, accept and value this rejected part of our nature, and that only in this way can her energies be used for creative, rather than destructive, purposes. Lilith, who to the early Jews represented unbridled sexual and emotional energies, becomes most dangerous when repressed or unacknowledged. Like the Cabbalists, most modern psychologists would also accept this view.

So, it is entirely appropriate that Ted, at the start of this fourth, most worldly journey along the Cabbalistic paths, should bring Lilith immediately into the light, revealing her and her witchy power and beauty within the controlled framework of this poem. It is entirely appropriate, too, that he should embody her in Assia Wevill, the woman whose dream world, as it seems from this poem, curiously matched his own, and who, in the *Capriccio* poems is described as matching his needs and desires then, as he matched hers:

So they ransacked each other. What he wanted
Was the gold, black-lettered pelt

Of the leopard Ein-Gedi.
She wanted only the runaway slave.

...

(‘Folktale’)

In ‘Dreamers’, Ted assembles the three people who were present at the start of this final journey along the Cabbalistic paths. They are three vulnerable people, brought together not entirely by accident, possibly by Fate, stepping off blindly and Fool-ishly towards the future. For the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the epigram for meditation on this path is, appropriately, “Folly’s doom is ruin”.

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The Path of the Fool – Aleph

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Joining Sephiroth 1(Kether) and 2(Chokmah)

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By giving birth, Sylvia's triumph over Death was something quite apart from her battle against the depressions caused by her father's death and her own struggles against writing blocks and "poetic death". It was a different kind of triumph, expressing a different aspect of the Goddesses powers. But summoned into the poem by Ted, Isis as Enchantress also provides poetic inspiration to support his magic and this poem brings Sylvia vividly to life.

Sadly, the promise and the new optimism with which Ted and Sylvia here began their journey along the Yetziritic paths was not to last. Death had been only temporarily defeated and, although Sylvia "had hidden him / From [herself] and deceived even Life", she had not conquered him. So, by the time Ted and Sylvia reach the lower, material World of Assiah, their difficulties have still not been resolved and they are unprepared for challenges which face them. Although their individual determination to achieve direct access to the sources of their creative inspiration and to live their lives as poets has not diminished, their paths have begun to diverge. Isis, too, whilst still their teacher and inspiration, takes on a far more dangerous aspect in this lower World, for her power is most often present here in the form of Hecate, Kali, Lilith and other dark goddesses of the Underworld which is so close below the World of Assiah.

'Dreamers' (BL 157), which is the poem which represents the path of The Fool in the World of Assiah, describes events which began in August 1961, and it marks a less happy beginning. Choices already made and experience gathered along the paths already travelled, have brought the questers to this next path with patterns of thought and behaviour ready to be crystalized. And because Assiah is the world of crystalization, a place of fixed, earth-bound, material things, and closer to the

Underworld than to the Divine Source, it is a world of masks and hollow values in which the journey is less free. Fate holds stronger sway. And the Fool displays more characteristics of the Trickster - is more reckless and more subject to the instinctive, earthy, animal energies. He still carries his staff, or wand, over his shoulder and still has magical, psychic powers, but he is less able to change things. He is altogether more worldly-foolish - more full of folly.

All three people in 'Dreamers' are foolish and naïve, fascinated and "helpless" as if in an opiate dream. It is not that they have no freedom, but that they are beginning this journey in a weak, vulnerable, emotional state, too easily swayed by their desires, too ready to be made the "puppets" of Fate. It is this weakness, which allows Fate to sniff them out and "assemble" them for "its experiment".

Assia Wevill is the third helpless dreamer in this poem. In September, 1961, she and her husband had taken over the London flat in which Sylvia and Ted had been living before they bought Court Green. Sylvia and Ted had been so drawn to them that they had destroyed a cheque from another man in order to let them have the flat (SPLH 13 Aug. 1961), and in May, 1962, Sylvia invited this "nice young Canadian poet and his very attractive, intelligent wife" down to Devon for the weekend (SPLH 14 May 1962).

Assia Guttman, whose mother was German and father a Russian Jew, had been born in Berlin in 1927 and had lived in the German Colony in Palestine during the war. She spoke Russian, German and English, and a little Hebrew "survived on bats and spiders / In the guerilla priest-hole / Under [her] tongue" ('Shibboleth', *Capriccio*, Gehenna, 1990). Sylvia was "fascinated" by her accent and her history and her erotic, exotic "many blooded beauty". It was almost as if she were Sylvia's "dream-self": the shadowy double who crept into the nightmare fantasies of poems like 'Lady Lazarus' (SPCP 244).

Sylvia, in 'Dreamers', "cultivated her", but was wary of this "Lilith of abortions" who touched her children with "tiger-painted nails". This is a chilling image, for Lilith, in Jewish legend, was the first wife of Adam who, banished and demonised, was jealous of Eve's children and became their devourer. Lilith was made with Adam from dust and was his equal in every way but, refusing to submit to his will, she invoked the Name of God in order to escape. For this invocation, she was banished. Then, because Adam had no mate, God took one of Adam's ribs and created Eve – made from him and therefore part of him and subject to his will. Lilith, meanwhile, conceived her own demonic children by coupling with men in their sleep, provoking erotic nightmares and nocturnal emission.

Yet there is another aspect to Lilith which the Cabbalists accept. She, who was created alongside Adam and from the same substance, is part of our humanity. It is we who, by rejecting her and demonising her, have made her dangerous and destructive. Cabbalists believe that we must learn to recognise, accept and value this rejected part of our nature, and that only in this way can her energies be used for creative, rather than destructive, purposes. Lilith, who to the early Jews represented unbridled sexual and emotional energies, becomes most dangerous when repressed or

unacknowledged. Like the Cabbalists, most modern psychologists would also accept this view.

So, it is entirely appropriate that Ted, at the start of this fourth, most worldly journey along the Cabbalistic paths, should bring Lilith immediately into the light, revealing her and her witchy power and beauty within the controlled framework of this poem. It is entirely appropriate, too, that he should embody her in Assia Wevill, the woman whose dream world, as it seems from this poem, curiously matched his own, and who, in the Capriccio poems is described as matching his needs and desires then, as he matched hers:

So they ransacked each other. What he wanted
Was the gold, black-lettered pelt
Of the leopard Ein-Gedi.
She wanted only the runaway slave.

...

(‘Folktale’)

In ‘Dreamers’, Ted assembles the three people who were present at the start of this final journey along the Cabbalistic paths. They are three vulnerable people, brought together not entirely by accident, possibly by Fate, stepping off blindly and Fool-ishly towards the future. For the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the epigram for meditation on this path is, appropriately, “Folly’s doom is ruin”.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional
Magus cardBeth path
The Path of the Magician – Beth

Tarot card 1. Tree path 2.

Joining Sephiroth 1(Kether) and 3(Binah)

‘Caryatids (2)’, ‘Ouija’, ‘Epiphany’, ‘Fairy Tale’

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For the Cabbalist, the number 1 is unity, the beginning of all, the spark from the Divine Source which holds all in latency. It is all and nothing, the point and the circle. The

number 2 represents the first division of that unity, the first extension of it into time and space. 2 is duality and polarity. It is the beginning and the end, spirit immersed in matter, light and dark, self and other. It can be symbolized by a cross with equal arms or by a bisected circle: unity divided but not separated.

That such polarities should derive from a single divine source is a problem which has long exercised theologians and philosophers but which poets and mythographers have resolved by allegory.

As Robert Fludd, the seventeenth-century Rosicrucian and Hermeticist whose *Memory Theatre* Hughes links with the Cabbalistic Tree of Life (SGCB 32), noted in his careful examination of Cabbala:

It is a wondrous thing, and passing all human understanding, that out of one Unity in essence and nature, two branches of such opposite nature should arise and sprout forth, as are Darkness (which is the seat of error, deformity, contention, privation, or death) and Light (which is the vehicle of truth, beauty, love, position, and life). He noted, too, that faced with so “ticklish and difficult” a problem, “the wiser sort of Poetical Philosophers... did roll up or wrap” their explanations of this dichotomy in fabulous allegorical stories. Citing various Ancient Greek sources, he wrote:

... Orpheus, Hesiod, Euripides and Aeschylus¹(who have enveloped in their fabulous Counts and Stories such hidden secrets as they had learned from divine persons, and such as were profoundly seen in the mysteries of God)... term [the one eternal essence] by the name Apollo in the day-time... Again they entitle it Dioysius in the night-time. (Fludd, *Philosophia mosaical*, Rammazenus, Gouda, 1638).

The number 2, then, is closely linked with Apollo and Dionysus, and with all the mythological and folk-lore figures which are related to them or derive from them. Of these, Hermes/Mercury is the most significant here because it is his image which appears as The Magician on the Tarot card associated with Beth, path 2 on the Cabbalistic journey.

Hermes, like his brothers Apollo and Dionysus, was fathered by the god, Zeus. Each had a different mother but all three mothers were of earthly origin, so their sons were born of the mating of heavenly and earthly elements. All three brothers, therefore, embodied duality. But, whereas Apollo and Dionysus represented the extremes of light and darkness, Hermes' nature was a complex mixture of the two. He could understand and juggle the dualities of his nature and he was, therefore, chosen as a suitable guide and mediator for those travelling the Cabbalistic path numbered 2.

Hermes is generally described as clever and dexterous, skilful and devious, a guide to the human soul, a magician, a protector of travellers and, sometimes, a thief. According to Robert Graves, who tells the myth of Hermes birth and precociousness in detail (*Greek Myths*, Cassell, 1981. p.24), Zeus was amused and proud of his son's cleverness and of his ability to trick his older brothers and to wriggle out of difficult situations, so he made him his herald and gave him responsibility for all divine property,

including the human soul. Hermes promised Zeus that he would never tell lies, but that he could not promise always to tell the whole truth. Such, was his duplicity.

As befits Hermes's complex and tricky nature, his Tarot card, which is usually called The Magician, may also be called The Magus (the knowledgeable wielder of occult powers) or The Juggler (the devious magician who deceives by trickery and slight-of-hand).

The journeyer on path number 2 (Beth, the path of The Magician) must learn to recognise the duality of their own nature - their own potential for being Magus or Juggler – and the fact that all dualities are part of the same divine whole and must be reconciled if wholeness is to be regained. This is a tricky path. Hermes may offer guidance in some form, some sign perhaps from the gods, but the journeyer must be wary and alert to recognise it; and often the journeyer is faced with a choice, as at a crossroads, which ultimately determines his or her future direction.

On the Cabbalistic Tree, the number 2 applies both to Sephira 2 (Chokmah) and to the path which joins Sephira 1 (Kether) and Sephira 3 (Binah). In Birthday Letters, the poem representing the number 2 is 'Caryatids (2)' (BL 5). This is not the second poem in the book but the one which, as discussed earlier, is positioned as if at the apex of the right-hand pillar of the temple. In the Atziluthic World, the world of archetypes, it represents Abba, the Father, the archetype of masculine energy; it also represents Hermes/Mercury (Mercury is the Roman name for this god), the embodiment of dualities. In the Atziluthic World, too, the first three paths, like the first three Sephiroth, share the divine energies and are considered equally necessary. They represent different aspects of the divine in matter which together make the whole: allegorically, they represent the Garden before the Fall – the garden in which Adam and Eve were created, in which the Serpent, too, existed, and in which Adam and Eve first became self-conscious.

In 'Caryatids (2)', Ted and his male Cambridge University friends still display many attributes of The Fool. They share the Fool's naïve optimism; they are still "stupid with confidence", "still growing", "careless": ready, we might say, for a fall. They wear the "playclothes" of The Magician and juggle their options, trying out various roles, "playing at friendship", "playing at students", improvising and acting on every mercurial whim with no thought for the consequences.

In February, 1956, Sylvia, also at Cambridge University, wrote in her journal about one young man she knew there:

... his ego is like an unbroken puppy... He flies socially, from girl to girl and party to party and tea to tea (25 Feb. 1956).

This is the pattern of behaviour of the men in the poem and it is, in its exaggeration, the archetype of male student behaviour. One of the polarities in the poem is the contrast between the "frivolous", drunken world of these students and that of the world outside the university – the world which, like the "tourists" themselves, intrudes only briefly and

“politely” on Sundays.

Yet this is not the main polarity in the poem, for although the visitors and the outside world are more sober and responsible than the students, a tourist’s world is in some ways equally artificial.

The main polarity is suggested by the crossroads at the heart of the poem and by the choice which Ted and all his friends must make. Realistically for students studying at university, there appear to be more than two choices. In the poem, the pattern is web-like, with roads which seem to lead to “every degree of the compass” and to open “too deeply”. Faced with such depths, it might seem from the students’ behaviour that they fearfully postpone any decision, preferring to live a superficial life, experimenting and testing their powers and able to rationalise this as gaining their “education” first.

But is buried fear of making such choices the only reason for the boredom and the “cornucopia of airy emptiness” which the students drunkenly drain and fill and drain again? And are these phrases, so closely linked in the poem with “the brown and the yellow ale” of one of James Joyce’s collection of drinking songs², simply a sly description of university literary studies? Both, perhaps: just as the God-like “makings and unmakings” can equally well refer to these students’ poetic enterprises as to their games.

Maya pictureYet although such duality may be as intentional as it is appropriate, it is not the only duality to be found. A far more revealing and far more important duality, that between truth and illusion, is suggested by Sylvia’s poem, which is an essential part of her and is also the first female presence in the poem. At the centre of a web, like the Indian goddess, Shakti-Māyā who is often represented as a spider, a seductress who weaves the web of illusion which is our world of time and space, the poem sits at the centre of the events which this poem describes and, almost literally, “here at the centre” of this poem’s web of words.

For the Cabbalist, the real world is not the impermanent, changing world in which we live, but the eternal, unchanging World of the Divine Spirit to which every soul must eventually return. The students in this poem live under the illusion that they have “time in plenty”; that “grave life” (the pun precisely suggests life after death) and the real World (capitalised at the beginning of a line) can be “deferred”. And, although the poem tells of events which did happen to a particular group of students, there is a sense in which we are all like these students when it comes to dealing with the world of spirit: we are all adept at immersing ourselves in the trivia of our lives and blocking out any deep thought about what happens after death.

Like these students, we are “like prisoners” of the illusory, impermanent reality of the material world, and the world of the spirit intrudes on our consciousness only, perhaps, on Sunday. Sunday is still, for most of us, a day off work when we can be tourists. Once, it was a Holy Day set aside for worshipping God. And it was named for the Sun god.

So, at the heart of this poem sits the spider which Campbell, in *The Masks of God* (Penguin, London, 1978. Vol IV p.78), identifies with “Duality (dvandva)” and also (p.291) with the great Goddess Mother of the universe in whose womb opposites are united. It is worth noting, too, that the Goddess is also Isis and, in the Tarot, the High Priestess, whose veil hides the Divine World from the profane³. As discussed earlier, Sylvia, in *Caryatids* (1) represents this goddess, so it is likely to be no accident that in *Caryatids* (2) we hear of the seductive “dance” of her “blonde veils”.

Into the world of mercurial masculine energies, the Goddess intruded. Sylvia’s poem, like Māyā in her web, enticed the unwary and Ted and his friends were most unwary. Wiser men would have acknowledged the Goddess, accepted this female essence and begun to merge self and other. Ted and his friends made the opposite choice and there were no half measures about it, they jokingly dismembered her⁴. It was an act of hubris which affected all their lives and which led, in life and in the poem, to “an elegy” and to Sylvia’s bleak end.

Interestingly, although Ted and all his friends are depicted in the poem as fools, jugglers and tricksters, it is “our Welshman” (Daniel Huws) who is finally gifted with the second sight of a Bardic Magician. His elegy⁵ fills him “Worlds later” on Cader Idris, the magic mountain in Merionethshire, Wales, where it is said that anyone spending the night in “Merlin’s Chair” on the summit will be found in the morning mad, dead or a poet. So, this poem encompasses the juggler and the magician; the beginning and the end of Ted’s and Sylvia’s shared story; and the two worlds which are the whole concern of the Cabbalistic journey.

In Briah, the World where the abstract, intangible patterns of creation are formed, the poem on path 2, The Magician’s path, is ‘Ouija’ (BL 53). Suitably, it shows Ted and Sylvia seeking occult guidance by means of the alphabet, and duality is clearly defined from the start: “Two goals: ‘Yes’ at one end. ‘No’ at the other”.

Hermes, The Magician, it should be remembered is both a messenger (Zeus’s herald) and a guide to the human soul. He is also a juggler, expert at deception and jokes, and he is not always completely truthful. In ‘Ouija’ it seems that the spirits which communicate with Ted and Sylvia display all of these characteristics.

The first spirit contact, unwarily and swiftly made, seems to come from the Underworld rather than from the Divine Source. Her messages are full of images of death – of “rotteness”, “worms” and “bones” – and her influence is malign. She leaves them feeling unclean, as if “Some occult pickpocket / Had slit the soul’s silk and fingered us”.

Ted and Sylvia are disturbed by this, but not disturbed enough to stop their casual dabbling in the occult arts. Still naïve and overconfident of their psychic skills, they ignore the warning which the appearance of such a polluting spirit should have been to them and continue to lean precariously “over the brink of letters” and fish in the dark “well of Ouija”. The second time, they are answered by a swift joker and gambler who

identifies himself, as Sylvia's journals and a letter to her mother tell us, as 'Pan' (SPJ 4 July 1958; SPLH 5 July 1958).

In Ted Hughes's editorial notes for Sylvia's own poem, 'Ouija' (SPCP 77) and her verse 'Dialogue Over a Ouija Board' (SPCP 276-87), he writes of only one spirit which is the one they "regularly applied to". It is this spirit's communications which are described as usually being "gloomy" and "macabre", and Sylvia's own poem describes him as "a chilly god", "a god of shades". Her verse dialogue, the notes tell us, contains "the 'spirit' text of one of [their] Ouija sessions". This male spirit, then, was Pan. And the couple in the verse dialogue note his playfulness and teasing, his "binge of jeers", his "insolence", and the realisation that "There is no truth in him".

Pan, in Greek mythology, is most often identified as the son of Hermes. He is a temperamental and lazy soothsayer; he is guardian of the land's bounty – sheep, cattle and bees; and he is the ugly, priapic, goat-footed god of Arcadia who is to be seen dancing and playing his reed pipes amongst the nymphs and satyrs who accompany the drunken Bacchus/Dionysus in his revels.

In Ted's Birthday Letters poem, the Ouija spirit offers to prove his soothsaying skills by predicting the results of the week's football matches so that Ted and Sylvia can "make their fortune" from the Littlewood's Football Pools. But he is "too eager": too focussed on the dichotomy of "winners and losers", too involved in the games, too distracted by the multiplicity of details to choose correctly. He loses "Simple solidarity with the truth".

"There's a lesson here", Ted notes. It is a clear and unequivocal statement, and it does point to an important lesson which was discussed in detail in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being (Faber, 1992). There, Ted writes of "Simplicity as the breath of the locked-up word of Divine Truth" (SGCB 278), the revelation of which is "first-hand and mystic", not something which can be passed on in words or in ideologies; or, in the context of this poem, by the "discredited clairvoyance" of spirits summoned to tell fortunes.

Simplicity, too, is the essence of the poem which the Ouija spirit spells out and declares to be "a great poem". The poem is like a Grail text, with its god hidden and nameless and its "myriad" weeping women whose tears water a parched wasteland, but it is also very like a Taoist poem about Simplicity and wordlessness. As Lao Tzu puts it in the ancient Chinese classic, Tao Te Ching (Penguin, 1963 p.57):

The Tao (Way) that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name
The nameless was the beginning of Heaven and Earth,
The named was the Mother of the myriad⁶ creatures.
Simplicity and multiplicity; speech and wordlessness, nothing and everything: the

division of the one into the many begins on this particular Cabbalistic path – path 2 – and the Taoist Way and the Cabbalistic journey both seek the same end: wholeness, the Nothing, the Divine Source.

But as well as a sacred element, there is an earthy, pagan side to this “great” poem, too. If the spirit is indeed Pan, he may well be recalling the part he once played in the orgiastic festivals of Dionysus. In these festivals, which were associated with the Goddess and with the death and resurrection of her son on whom the vegetative life of the earth depended, the priapic Pan was an important part of the retinue of the god who died (or was sacrificed), who was mourned by women in a frenzy of weeping, and who was reborn amidst joyous celebration by his followers, the Bacchants, as the mystic Iacchus.

The Ouija spirit also loves Shakespeare. His favourite play, King Lear, is one which Hughes considers in great detail in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, where he describes it as a vital part of the “Mythic Equation” which he traces throughout Shakespeare’s work. He analyses it in terms of a journey of the soul in which words, silence, simplicity and truth, play an important part both in the story and as symbols which Shakespeare uses in essentially the same way as do many mystical teachings, including Cabbala.

But in Birthday Letters, the Ouija spirit’s love of Shakespeare again has a more mundane side to it. Lear’s line, “Never, never, never, never, never”, may be the most powerful and moving iambic line in the whole of Shakespeare, but Pan’s faulty memory of what follows it seems to offer some practical proof that Ted and Sylvia (who do remember what follows) are not controlling him. And his own facility with iambic metre (noted by Sylvia in her ‘Ouija’ poem as “apt iambs”) is a reminder that his daughter, Iambe, is credited with inventing this metre.

Fickle, rude, fallible and mischievous as the Ouija spirit clearly is, he is, Ted tells us, “More often serious”. Sylvia’s shocked, excessive and seemingly inexplicable reaction to Ted’s question about fame is linked directly in the poem’s lines with this statement. The Ouija glass does not move, it does not speak through the alphabet as it usually does, instead, it seems to the poet looking back, that Sylvia had from it some direct and silent revelation about their future and the terrible price that fame, when it came, would extract. It is a trick of Pan’s to cause sudden frights (hence the word ‘panic’) and this is exactly what Sylvia’s reaction seems to be. So this Ouija spirit expresses his nature, but also in his skills he demonstrates another duality: through him come both the casual dissemination of faulty prophecy and the direct intimation of some terrifying truth. He, like his father Hermes, does not always tell the whole truth, but he does not lie.

Sylvia, then, is frightened out of casually dabbling with the Ouija for purposes of fame and fortune. It seems that she learns a sharp lesson consistent with what the journeyer should learn from the energies of this path, which leads to Sephira 3 (Binah) Understanding. What she learns is consistent, too, with experience of the negative aspects of Binah, which include the vice, avarice; and with the Spiritual Experience of

Binah, which is the Vision of Sorrow – a revelation of the illusionary materialistic World which may well be glimpsed here by the traveller.

Ted, too, learns from Sylvia's instinctive response and her sudden words. She speaks as if possessed, her face distorted, her voice cracked, "like thunder and flash together", and he learns that worldly ambition (the word is used three times in three lines) is not what he is meant to be seeking. He learns that he has misunderstood, that he has been under an illusion, and that he has changed his own life and his own natural inclinations for something which he thought others wanted of him but which turns out to have been a lie.

The poem began with the statement that the Ouija board always brought bad news. It ends with lines which tell the bald and awful truth of what just that one piece of intuitively received bad news really did portend for Sylvia. And so this poem encompasses the dualities of The Magician's path and tells of some of the difficulties and dangers which must be faced on the Cabbalistic journey.

In the World of Yetzirah, where The Magician's poem is 'Epiphany' (BL 113), Hermes/Mercury appears with his message at the very heart of the poem. The mood for this epiphany, this "meeting with a superhuman being" (as the COED defines this word) is set by the "lilac softness" of the April evening and by Ted's almost "light headed" state. This is exactly the right dream-like mood for a spirit meeting.

On a bridge, more specifically on the very "hump" of the bridge, as if between two worlds (or two lives, as the poem later suggests) Ted meets a man who could almost be his shadow self: a man carrying a fox cub. Not only is a fox cub a suitably mercurial animal with the "flashing temperament" and "mannerless energy" of Hermes, it is also a creature which had special meaning for Ted. He used it often in his poetry and prose as if it was a familiar, a shamanic guide, almost his totem animal. Once before, in Cambridge, a spirit fox had visited him and that time he accepted its message and changed his life accordingly⁷.

In *What is the Truth* (Faber 1984) the fox appears more often than any other animal. It is a "jolly farmer" caring, as Pan does, for nature's bounty – the hares, geese, voles, lambs and other small animals which just happen also to be its food. In another poem it is described in a riddle: an opera-scarfed dandy conducting his orchestra in the hen house, Robin Hood cheating King Pheasant of his gold and Dracula showing us the moon through the bottom of his top hat then bringing out of it: "in a flourish of feathers / The goose we locked up at sunset". Yet another aspect of the truth about foxes in this book is its role as a scapegoat, pursued by the Hunting Horn for our "malice and suspicion", our "wicked blood", our fears and cowardice. And finally, in the beautiful and moving poem which first appeared as *A Solstice* in a limited edition (Sceptre Press 1978), it meets the hunters face to face:

A strangely dark fox
Motionless in its robes of office

Is watching us. It is a shock.

Too deep in the magic wood, suddenly

We have met the magician.

So, in 'Epiphany', it is not just a fox which Ted rejects on the hump of the bridge, but a creature which he regards as very special: Pan, Hermes, the juggler, the Magician, his own familiar.

The reasons for his choice, in the poem, are rational and mundane. Rather than pay the price of accepting the irrational, "boundless", unpredictable energies of the fox, he chose the easy path: order, and the conventional and seemingly predictable domestic "crate of space". It seems a sensible enough choice for a young man with a wife and a new-born baby, living in a tiny flat in London, to have made but looking back Ted sees it as a symbolic choice. This fox whose mother roams the "huge whisper of the constellations", this orphaned-looking, "woebegone" little creature which is literally a vision of sorrow, had looked past the other people and then directly at Ted, choosing him from amongst the crowd. But Ted walked away and escaped "into the Underground". In the light of all he ever wrote in his poetry and his prose about the importance of accepting irrational, instinctive, imaginative energies as they manifest themselves in our lives, it is no wonder that he later sees this choice as a mistake.

Had he "paid the price" and accepted the energies, what then? He leaves the question unanswered – as it must be, for there was no guarantee that the eventual outcome would have been different. But the choice he did make, which was to reject nature and instinct and to accept instead Sylvia's goals of a house, domesticity, publication and public acclaim, he sees as critical and disastrous. He walked "As if out of my own life". And he acted, as in 'Ouija', according to what he thought others (Sylvia, in this instance) might think and do and without considering that he might be mistaken.

The marriage between Ted and Sylvia, as is shown in Birthday Letters, was more than a legal contract. It was a questing partnership, an alchemical conjunction which, as in alchemy, needed to be tested again and again with Mercury and Sulphur (dissolve and coagulate is the repeated formula in alchemy) before the true spiritual gold could be achieved. This is what "comes with a fox", this mercurial and sulphurous (the fox's "old smell") testing. And in refusing to accept this test, Ted effectively stopped the alchemical process and doomed their shared quest to failure.

The final lines of the poem state quite clearly that this was the point of no return. From then on in Birthday Letters the duality is fixed, the "marriage" is ended. This, then is the crossroads at which the "wrong fork" asked about a few poems later in the sequence ('Error', BL 122) was taken.

So, by the time the couple reach The Magician's path in the World of Assiah they have moved very far in the wrong direction and the division between them has become more marked.

The Magician appears in various forms in 'Fairy Tale' (BL 159). One who is not mentioned by name but whose work was well-known to Ted and Sylvia and whose influence is most strongly felt in the poem is Dr John Dee. Dee (1527-1608), was an Elizabethan Magus who was court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I. He taught Sir Philip Sidney (amongst others of the Court circle) and he was closely associated with that group of Sidney's friends who were experimenting with the magical and mystical powers of measured verse⁸. Although Dee was a serious student of Mathematics, Cabbala, Hermeticism, Alchemy and Astrology and was highly esteemed by many scholars in England and Europe, he was deeply involved in the practice of natural magic and was commonly branded a conjurer.

With his skryer, the medium Edward Kelly, Dee practiced Cabbalistic angel-magic. It was angelic spirits which dictated to them the complex system of numbered and lettered tablets and the means of using these tablets to summon the forty-nine Angels, 'Airs' or 'Aethers', each of which, they believed, controlled some part of earthly existence. These forty-nine Angels can be represented on a Cabbalistic Tree in which each of the seven lower Sephiroth (those below the first three Sephiroth of the supernal triangle and occupying what is commonly termed 'the abyss') contains a similar tree of seven Sephiroth (or 'palaces', as they are sometimes called). The calls or invocations which summoned these forty-nine Angels were the keys to calling on their magical powers to open the 'Gates of Understanding'. Forty-nine became John Dee's magic number and he incorporated these angelic letters into the Great Seal which was his most important magic tool.

Forty-nine (so we are told in 'Fairy Tale') was also Sylvia's magic number. There is no evidence of this in her published poems and stories or in her journals and letters to her mother. But duality is so woven into the fabric of this poem, and the Divine Source is so far from this World of Assiah, that it is often difficult to distinguish truth from illusion, white magic from black, fairy tale from reality. There is ample evidence in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being that Ted, himself, was very familiar with John Dee's work and, in the poem, the couple clearly share the knowledge of Sylvia's "high palace", "there among the eagles" – or, at least, they share the knowledge of forty-eight of the rooms. The forty-ninth was to have been opened "some day, together".

However, Ted, like a male version of Bluebeard's wife, is allowed to explore only forty-eight rooms of Sylvia's dream castle. The forty-ninth is forbidden to him. The imagery of dark, sexual power which runs beneath the Bluebeard story is here, too, but it is Sylvia who has the power. Like Hecate, the dark Moon Goddess of the Underworld who was believed to haunt crossroads and tombs, she flies off every night to meet her "Ogre lover" whose "voodoo carcass" is crammed with all her earlier lovers. The poem is full of paganism: of tarred, burning effigies which mean no more to Sylvia than a "child's night-light"; of necromancy and deception. But, as in all the Birthday Letters poems, there are references to real events and situations too. Sylvia did write about her former boy-friends and lovers in her "secret journals", and the one which burned brightest at the time she met Ted was Richard Sassoon. Now, in the poem, there are suggestions of promiscuity, hidden secrets and jealousy, all of which Ted "never saw"

before, and all of which are characteristic of the malign powers of this World of Assiah, which can distort and corrupt human perception and behaviour.

There are Cabbalistic parallels, too, for of the forty-nine invocations which were given to Dee and Kelly – the forty-nine keys which were to open the Gates of Understanding and lead to the paths of Wisdom – only forty-eight were to be used. The forty-ninth was forbidden.

Nor were Dee and Kelly the only Cabbalists to know about the forty-nine keys to the Gates of Understanding, even at the time that Dee was recording his Angelic communications. There are many different accounts of these forty-nine levels of wisdom in Cabbala and they are essentially part of the Cabbalistic journey. Traditionally only a Magus, who has successfully opened all the Gates of Understanding and travelled all the Paths of Wisdom, may safely open the forty-ninth gate which leads back from the abyss to the Supernal levels and, specifically, to Sephira 3 (Binah: Understanding).

In Jewish Cabbala, for example, Moses was such a Magus. He was the Hermes figure: an able magician who carried the magic snake-staff and acted as God's messenger. He was the only one of his people sufficiently spiritually prepared to be spoken to directly by God. And in Jewish lore, it was he who brought the Word of God to his people and who guided them through the forty-nine Gates of Understanding in order to bring them out of Egypt to the Promised Land. The ritual of the Counting of the omer, which is still part of Jewish Passover, celebrates this journey "from the brink of the spiritual abyss"⁹.

So, what are we to make of the information in 'Fairy Tale' that both Ted and Sylvia could open the forty-ninth door? Both, in Cabbalistic terms, must have passed through the forty-eight Gates of Understanding to be at this point, but we already know that along the way they had taken the "wrong fork". They were therefore, not spiritually prepared for entrance to the Palace of Binah, which is the seat of Aima, the Great Goddess who is also Isis. For "the high initiate", according to Aleister Crowley, "She is light and the body of light. She is the truth behind that veil of light. She is the soul of light"¹⁰. Like the sun, truth is powerful and dangerous, creative and destructive: like the sun, those who are exposed to it without careful preparation will be destroyed.

Throughout her journey to poetic rebirth (the struggle to find and release Ariel which Ted discusses in detail in 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals'¹¹) Sylvia had focussed on her own "deep and inclusive inner crisis" (WP 179). Her gaze was focussed inwards on her own life, on what she herself called "the old father-worship subject" (SPJ 19 Oct. 1959), on her "ogre lover". The first stage of her rebirth, as Ted describes it, came from reassembling "the ruins of her mythical father", a process which began for her with a dream (WP 182). The last stage, entailed confronting him "point blank" and "demythologising" him (WP 187). Her love for her father, whom she calls an "ogre" in one journal entry (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958), was the essence of that rebirth, and it is to this god/father that she flies in 'Fairy Tale'.

Behind Sylvia's Ariel poems, Ted wrote, was a vision of Paradise which "was eerily

frightening, an unalterable spot-lit vision of death" (WP 161). He described the poetry of Ariel as "the last flight of what we had been trying to get flying for a number of years"; then added, "But it dawned on me only in the last months which way it wanted to fly". In Cabbalistic terms, Sylvia was not looking towards the Heavens. She was looking in the wrong direction.

For Ted, the focus for rebirth was always Nature: the life and death cycles and the energies of the natural world. His gaze had always been focussed outwards and towards the Goddess. So, like a magician in a fairy tale, a blade of grass is the skeleton key with which he opens the forty-ninth door: for what is a blade of grass but the simplest, humblest sign of Nature's bounty and, as has already discussed, the power of simplicity is one of the things which must be learned on the Cabbalistic path. But he was clearly unprepared for the consequences of opening that door. What he glimpsed – what panicked him – was the terrifying dark aspect of truth, and both he and Sylvia plunged into the abyss.

Ted, who was always careful to protect himself with ritual and myth from the energies he summoned, fell into the abyss but was not altogether destroyed. Sylvia never protected herself in this way. Ted wrote that her "poetic genius and the active self were the same", and that she "had none of the usual guards and remote controls to protect herself from her own reality"(UU 181)¹². Sylvia was destroyed.

So again the poem encompasses the beginning and the end of the journey, and the dualities and the dangers which the journeyer must face on The Magician's path.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Ted Hughes was very familiar with these sources and was, in fact, translating works by Euripides and Aeschylus at the time that he was writing many of the Birthday Letters poems.
2. Two versions and notes about this song can be found at Traditional Songs. Thanks to Charles Cave and Ross Chambers for directing me to this link.
3. The day after I wrote this, Colin Low sent me this link to On Separation. His timing was uncanny and his essay beautifully links the veil of Isis with the cross which represents duality.
4. In his published review of this and another of Sylvia's poems, Daniel Huws wrote of their "quaint and eclectic artfulness", and (with supreme male-chauvinism, as if female beauty might influence a poem's worth) "... my better half tells me "Fraud, fraud", but I will not say so; who am I to know how beautiful she may be". These quotations and Sylvia's poem, "Three Caryatids without a Portico" by Hugo Robus', can be found in Keith Sagar's book, *The Laughter of Foxes* (Liverpool University Press, 2000. pp. 48-9). Sylvia's own reaction to "the clever reviewer" and to "Human rooks which say: Fraud" is in her journal and letters (SPJ Feb 19, 20, 1956; SPLH 2 Feb. 1956).

5. Daniel Huw's poem 'O Mountain' (included in Noth, Secker and Warburg, London, 1972) was written as an elegy for Sylvia. Lucas Myers confirms this in his memoir Crow Steered Bergs Appeared (Proctor's Hall, Sewanee, Tennessee ,2001. pp. 27-8).

6. Myriad: from the Greek murioi, meaning 10,000. Not only is this word the usual word used in translation of the Lao Tzu from the Chinese, it is also a very significant Cabbalistic number being made up of 10 (the number of the World) and 000 (the number of the Absolute – the Divine Source). The Mother of the myriad creatures is, of course, Nature and the Goddess.

7. For an account of this see 'The Burnt Fox' in Winter Pollen, pp8-9.

8. French, P. John Dee, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1987.

9. Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, in a modern Internet magazine called 'Seasons of the Moon', writes of this ritual: "every night for seven weeks we count the days that have passed on this spiritual journey from Egypt to Sinai... ". ('Seasons of the Moon', Iyar, 5758 April 27, 1998 - May 25, 1998).

10. Crowley, A. The Book of Thoth, Weiser, NY, 1985. p73.

11. Hughes, T. 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', Winter Pollen, Faber, London, 1994. pp. 177-90

12. Hughes, T. 'Sylvia Plath (1966)' in Faas, E. (Ed) Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1980)

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Priestess card
Gimel path
The Path of The High Priestess – Gimel

Tarot Card 2. Tree path 3.

Joining Sephiroth 1 (Kether) and 6 (Tiphereth)

'Caryatids (1)', 'The Earthenware Head'. 'The Gypsy', 'The Blackbird'.

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The number 3, in Cabbala, is extremely important. In sacred Jewish Cabbala it represents the three-lettered name of God – the Holy Trinity. And in all other Cabbalistic teachings it is the mystical number which balances the Divine power of 1 and the force of 2 and brings them into dynamic equilibrium.

The number 1 represents the manifest Divine Spark, 2 the first division of Unity and the first linear extension of it into space and time, 3 gives that extension form and stability – literally, a third dimension. 3 is represented by an equilateral triangle. It links 1 and 2 together, it embodies the innate creative power through which all things are produced, and through it all things return to the Divine Source.

The third Sephira (Binah) on the Cabbalistic Tree is at the apex of the Pillar of Justice and is known as Judgement or Understanding. In the Atziluthic World of archetypes it represents Aima, the Great Mother, the Divine Feminine and the archetype of female energies. In sacred Jewish Cabbala she is the Bride of God through whom the manifest Wisdom speaks, and she is represented by the Torah (the scroll of the law). As the Shekinah, a female emanation of God, she accompanied the people of Israel into exile and led them through the desert as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night¹. In Renaissance Christianised Cabbala, because the female is the route through which the Divine energies directly enter the world, she came to be regarded as closer to the Divine than the male and to be exulted by philosophers and poets. This ran counter to other interpretations of the female as the source of sin and evil in the world, and the problem of evil was (and is) a topic of complex debate. The existence of evil, however, is agreed upon amongst Cabbalists. And whether it is regarded as the result of the dark, sexual powers of the female, or as the work of demons, or as caused by the initial act of separation in which Unity became divided, there is agreement that the Cabbalist must confront and deal with evil, repair that division, re-unite the exiled Shekinah with the Godhead.

Aima embodies triplicity. In mythology, she is the triple Goddess: the Virgin, the Wife and Mother, and the Hag: the channel and mediator of the Divine energies of creation and disintegration who, as such, has oracular power and can wield fierce judgement. Aima, in various forms, is present everywhere on the Cabbalistic Tree just as she is present in many forms in mythology. She is the mother goddess, the moon goddess, the goddess of love, the goddess of wisdom and the black goddess of judgement, death and destruction. And she has many names: Isis, Nephtys, Innana, Ishtar, Kali, Shakti-maya, Sophia, Artemis, Minerva, Lilith, Hecate and many more. Her element is water: she is The Bitter Sea from which all life comes and to which all must return. And her astrological sign is Saturn. In her highest and most spiritual form, she is the Holy Guardian whose brilliant veil of reflected light shields the Divine Spirit from the profane and whose judgement the quester must face at the end of their journey.

Path number 3 (Gimel) on the Cabbalistic journey (as opposed to Sephira number 3), is

the path of The High Priestess. It joins Sephiroth 1 (Kether: The Crown) and 6 (Tiphereth: Beauty, Manifest Glory, The Way) and it forms a central column of balance on the Tree. Through Tiphereth it channels the Divine energies directly to every Sephira and every path. The journeyer on the path of The High Priestess must learn to be a passive channel for her creative energies and must learn balance, selflessness and simple trust in intuition, through which comes the guidance of the "Indwelling Glory" – the spark of Divinity present in every created thing. But the High Priestess has both good and evil aspects and the dangers of the High Priestess's path are of illusion, sexual excess, glamour and bewitchment. The epigram used for meditation on this path by members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is appropriate: "The Holy Guardian Angel is attained by self-sacrifice and equilibrium".

In Birthday Letters, 'Caryatids (1)' (BL 4) is the poem which represents the number 3 in the Atziluthic World of archetypes. It embodies the female energies not only of the Caryatids themselves as priestesses of the goddess Artemis, but also of Sylvia and of her poem, "three Caryatids Without a Portico" by Hugo Robus".

Appropriately, there are three caryatids in Sylvia's poem and she describes them as "maidens", "virgin vases", all "torso, breast and thigh". The Catalogue of Hugo Robus's work (Tarbell, Hugo Robus (1885-1964), Smithsonian Institute, 1980. p.108) also refers to this particular sculpture (which exists in bronze and as a plaster maquette) as a group of "vases – vessels". It notes that it consists of free-standing torsos and that, "By the principal of pars pro toto, the part becomes the whole, the torso is the complete feminine being". So this sculpture, too, embodies a female archetype, and Sylvia's description of it is precise ("torso, breast and thigh" in "tranquil plaster") except for her reference to "aristocratic heads". The sculpture as it now exists (in both its forms) has no heads. Whether it ever did in the early stages of the plaster maquette and whether Sylvia saw it this way, I have been unable to establish but Robus wrote: "I was first attracted to the idea of the female form without arms by noticing the line and form produced by the 'halter' top bathing suit&hellip... The head forms were a hindrance and so I eliminated them" (Tarbell. p.210).

Robus picture

Robus's work [see my sketch to the right of this paragraph] is thoroughly modern: smooth and without detail, no portico, no heads. And it is this modernity which Sylvia contrasts in her poem with the "Classical" caryatids of Ancient Greece. What are we to make, though, of the fact that both Sylvia and Ted describe the caryatids' heads? And in Ted's poem, the caryatids not only have heads which support a "Heaven of granite", they are blindfolded too. Sylvia may well have seen the sculpture in an early stage but Ted describes things the sculpture never showed. Not one of the many figures shown in the Hugo Robus Catalogue is blindfolded. Nor, as far as I can determine, are any of the surviving Classical Greek caryatids, although many do support a "Heaven of granite".

The only goddess in Greek mythology who does sometimes wear a blindfold, and who is completely appropriate to the place Ted's poem occupies on the Cabbalistic Tree, is Themis, the Goddess of Justice who presides over earthly order and whose veil, like

that of Isis, obscures the Divine presence. She is the female counterpart of Mercury, born of the mating of heavenly and earthly energies, guide to those who journey on the paths to enlightenment, and the original oracular goddess to sit on the tripod in the sacred grotto at Delphi. Her symbols are scales and a sword, for judgement, balance and deadly justice, and she mediates between the world of Truth and our world of change and illusion: between the sacred and the profane. The three caryatids in Ted's poem can be seen as representing the Great Mother in her triple form or as acolytes of Artemis (as the human Caryatids were), Artemis being yet another form of this same goddess, renowned for her fierce justice and for her association with the oracle at Delphi.

If Ted did have Themis in mind then his careful choice of the word "bearing" in the first line of his poem can have many meanings. It suggests not only the supporting of a granite portico but also the weight of justice, the "deadfall" of punishment, and the portent of "omen" which he, blindly foolish and self-orientated ("In those days I coerced/ Oracular assurance/ In my favour out of every sign") at the start of the journey, failed to see. The place of judgement, the trap, would certainly have been "unsprung, empty", at the start of this journey, just as Sylvia's poetic powers were still uninspired and the poem she wrote cold as a "theorem", but the strength of all these women, these embodiments of the Great Mother, was immense, strong enough to stop a massive heaven of granite "mid-fall" with only "their hair". And Ted, busy coercing omens rather than trusting his feelings and intuition, "made nothing" of all this.

In the World of Briah, the world of abstract formative patterns, the Birthday Letters poem on the path of The High Priestess, is 'The Earthenware Head' (BL 57). This poem was first published in 1980. Only one other poem in the Birthday Letters sequence was published that early ('You Hated Spain' (BL 39)) and both were probably written when Ted began preparing Sylvia's journals for publication (these were first published in 1982).

Between the time when the poem was first published and 1995, when Ted told me in conversation that he had just written "about a hundred poems about things [he] should have dealt with thirty years ago... should have written then, but couldn't", Ted completed Shakespeare and The Goddess of Complete Being. (Faber, 1992)². Writing this book clearly immersed him deeply in Renaissance thought, Occult Neoplatonism, Hermeticism and Cabbala, which would have reinforced his own belief in practical magic and in the power of the "magically animated imagination" (SGCB 22). It seems very likely that it was this which prompted his own use of Cabbala in Birthday Letters³.

Amongst those things which Ted suggested would have been likely to attract Shakespeare to Occult Neoplatonism and Cabbala was "The idea of drama as a ritual for manipulation of the soul" (SGCB 33). And he believed that Shakespeare had designed at least some of his plays to bring about a spiritual effect on his audience. The purpose of this was exactly that of Cabbalists: to magically/imaginatively reinvent the past so as to understand it, resolve its disharmonies and create a new structural basis for the future. The purpose of Birthday Letters is, as I see it, the same⁴.

It is very likely, then, that 'The Earthenware Head' was written before the Cabbalistic pattern of Birthday Letters had been planned. As a description of events which occurred whilst Ted and Sylvia were living in Cambridge just after their marriage, and which Sylvia recorded in a letter to her mother and in two versions of her poem, 'The Lady and the Earthenware Head' (SPLH 8 Feb. 1957), (SPCP 69-70), it fits neatly into the chronology of events in Birthday Letters. But as a poem for the particular place it occupies in the Cabbalistic journey it reflects a darker side of the High Priestess than one might expect to encounter on this path, which is still so close to the energies of the Source.

Unexpectedly, the appropriateness of its use has much to do with Sylvia's own poem. Yet it also lies in the discrepancies which exist between Sylvia's feelings for the terra-cotta head which had been made of her by a room-mate at Smith, and those which Ted ascribes to her in his poem. Ted's poem reflects his own intuitive feelings about the head both at the time of the events and (perhaps reinforced by hindsight) as he wrote the poem.

In Sylvia's earliest version of the poem (included in a letter to her mother: SPLH 8 Feb. 1957), it is a male visitor's distaste for the "unlovely", "rude image" which prompts her to dispose of it. She describes the head in terms which strongly suggest a stellar goddess of justice, mentioning its "high status" and calling it: "Cousin perhaps to that vast stellar head / Housed in stark heavens, whose laws / Ordained now bland, now barbarous influences... ". She fears this goddess's wrath should the head be mistreated. And she is superstitious about her own link with the head, referring to "old wives' tales" of the "bond" or "nerve" which "knits to every original its course copy".

Yet, it is apparent that Sylvia did not dislike the head. She was "loath to junk it", and she told her mother not only that she had "developed a strange fondness for the old thing over the passing years" but also that, although her poem ended "differently", she liked to think of "my head", as it were, "now peacefully lodged in its willow bower where she feels "leaves and ivy twining around it, like a monument at rest in nature".

In spite of the haunting, "evil-starred" imagery with which Sylvia ended her poem, this was not the way she really felt about the head or she would not, three years later, have chosen "The Earthenware Head" as "the right title, the only title" for her book of poems (SPJ 18 Feb. 1958). Writing of this choice in her journal, she again identified the head as "The Double", "mirror twin, Muse", symbol of "earth & the words which shape it". And she called it "a sacred object, a terrible & holy token of identity sucking into itself magnet wise the farflung words which hint & fuse to make up my own queer & grotesque world – out of earth, clay, matter, the head shapes its poems & prophecies... " (SPJ 18 Feb. 1958).

Like the oracular bronze heads made by Hermetic magicians like Albertus Magnus (1193-1289) and Roger Bacon (1214-94) to transmit the prophecies of the gods, Sylvia's earthenware head was now to replace her own "crystal-brittle & sugar faceted

voice” which spoke of “triple-ringed life – birth love & death” – the essential concerns of the Goddess. In her journal, Sylvia identified with the head and invested it with her soul. Through it, like the Goddess, she would utter poems and prophecies. She was clearly bewitched by it.

Perhaps it was this bewitchment as well as the malign image which Sylvia left unvanquished in both versions of her poem, which prompted Ted, some twenty years later, to describe the earthenware head as “evil”. For although Sylvia’s poems show that she was intuitively aware of the double nature of the Goddess’s laws and of her aspect as Hag or Basilisk, she did not heed this warning and tread carefully or selflessly enough.

Ted’s poem, too, describes the earthenware head as Sylvia’s double, a mirror image from which she sought to protect herself by veiling it in poetry, “ransacking” her thesaurus, and “rhyming [herself] into safety”. And Ted, too, is performing a rite in this poem. In the “unease” of the dank, owl-haunted river-bank, amongst the “comfortless antlers” of pollarded willows and “switch-horns” (which suggest the Celtic, antlered god, Cernunnos, consort of the Goddess) he and Sylvia enshrine the head in a tree which is sacred to the Goddess and create a Herm. This Herm is not only a totemic symbol of the Goddess as Hecate, Minerva, Circe, it also has Sylvia’s head: “your head” being a nicely ambivalent phrase.

In both Ted’s and Sylvia’s poem, the earthenware head is left to weather away.

“What happened ?”, Ted asks. And he reiterates some of the possibilities which Sylvia suggested in her poem. But finally, he consigns it “Surely” to the river.

Yet, the river in Ted’s poem is more than just the River Cam at Grantchester. It is more than just a river on which student punts pass in summer, just as they did when Rupert Brooke wrote his poem, associating the Cam with Pan and Dis/Saturn and the “Hellespont or Styx”⁵ and dreaming of a stopped clock and “honey still for tea”. Ted, by his reference to Brooke’s poem and in his own lines, links the river with Saturn, “the Father” whose dark and muddy waters, “the stained mournful flow”, are the river of Time, forgetfulness and “the stopped clock”. And Saturn, too, is both father and spouse of the Goddess.

So, in Ted’s poem, the earthenware head which is “surely” Sylvia’s “deathless head”, whose chapel is “surely” the river, and which was created from earth, is just as surely returned to “muddled earth” and reunited with the Father, washed of all fears “and perfect”, Quite deliberately, too, all the “Evil” which was associated with the head shares this resolution. The word is capitalized, repeated twice, and carefully positioned for emphasis: once on its own on a single line and then as the final word of the poem.

So, although it is quite likely that this poem was written before Ted decided to attempt the Cabbalistic journey of Birthday Letters, it shows him performing a magical ritual of exactly the sort which a Cabbalist might attempt: a re-visualization of the event in order

to understand and resolve perceived disharmonies and create a new basis for the future.

In July 1961, when Frieda was fourteen months old, Ted and Sylvia left her in London in the care of Sylvia's visiting mother and went to France for a two week holiday. 'The Gypsy' (BL 116), the poem on the path of The High Priestess in the World of Yetzirah, recalls an event which Ted remembers from this time but which Sylvia never mentioned. In Rheims, in the shadow of the old cathedral of Notre Dame (Our Lady), the Goddess appears in Ted's poem, just as Mercury appeared in the Yetziratic World in the poem 'Epiphany'. Rheims Cathedral was built at a time in Mediaeval France when Mary, The Virgin, mother of Jesus, was replacing the old Goddess as a figure of worship. Like the older, more important cathedral at Chartres (which is also dedicated to The Virgin), Rheims Cathedral was built by a school of Master Builders who used geometrical principles based on Cabbala and sacred number theory to embody and symbolize the whole of Christian knowledge and Truth in their cathedrals⁶. Many of these cathedrals were built on sites of earlier, pagan temples dedicated to the Goddess.

Now, in Ted's poem, "Suddenly" in the shadow of the cathedral she is there. A "dark stub gypsy woman", "business-like / as a weasel" (a form often taken by the Goddess), who is expert at testing and judging – at getting past the surface shell and "finding the keyhole" in those who are vulnerable to her persuasive powers. The pendants she offers are "a Nicholas, a Mary": one a saint who is patron of virgins and voyagers; the other The Virgin herself, who in both Christian and pagan belief acts as mediator between humans and the Divine.

This gypsy, like The High Priestess on this path of Gimel (a path which links the Manifest Glory of Sephira 6 (Tiphereth, the Virgin's number) directly to the Source), is not only judging and testing, she also seems able to channel the energies, like a "lightning stroke", with deadly and prophetic ease. She is another form of the 'The Interrogator' in Cave Birds (CB 12): the ugly, black vulture which is the "key-hole" through which the sun's energies may spy. But Sylvia's casual vehemence stops her "stunned", as if Sylvia has a power which challenges her own. Like a jealous goddess, the gypsy reacts with a pointed, prophetic curse: "Soon, you will be dead". And the verb she uses, 'crêver' (meaning 'to burst' or 'to perish') suggests an unpleasant death by un-natural causes.

Sylvia seems not to hear or attend. But Ted is appalled. Feeling the primitive weight of the gypsy's words, he turns to the ancient, magical language of the Welsh Bards, Cynganedd⁷, to rhyme his own "talismans of power" with which to "neutralize her venom". Equally magical, in folk-lore, is his attempt to 'bribe the call home' by making imaginary visits to Rheims to find the gypsy and pay her to withdraw "her projectile". Above all, he hopes that Sylvia is protected in some way: that she is in some sanctuary, some closed crypt like one of the womb-like crypts below these Mediaeval cathedrals. This is where the poem leaves her. And this is where, in a later poem, 'Dream Life' (BL 141), in "the temple-crypt, / That private primal cave / Under the public dome of father worship", she inhales oracle and speaks prophecy, like the High Priestess herself.

In 'The Blackbird' (BL 162), the poem on the path of The High Priestess in the World of Assiah, Sylvia displays even more of the Goddess's powers but, because this World is far from the Source, she is both jailer and prisoner of her dark forces. The heavy rhythms, the rhyme and half-rhyme, and the almost accusatory repetition of "you" in Ted's poem, emphasise the darkness of the powers with which Sylvia was dealing but they also provide a protective, ritual framework for Ted's own evocation of those same powers. Like the gypsy, Sylvia has found the "keyhole" through which to reach the Goddess within herself and feed the rage which is to be heard so clearly in many of her Ariel poems. And, like the Goddess, she can plunge into the abyss (as she does in 'Fairy Tale') and spring back up the "coiled" "stairwell" (these words beautifully suggest the Path of the Serpent) from these depths. But she is caught, like a worm, at the very interface between darkness and light; at the "furnace door": held like the worm on the blackbird's "demon prong" as if the High Priestess has cast a glamour on her.⁸

Sylvia's own poem, 'Poppies in July' (SPCP 203), written in June 1962 shortly before she and Ted separated, makes a chilling accompaniment to Ted's poem. She longs for the numbing opiates these "little hell flames" should offer, but Ted's "Giant poppy faces" which "flamed and charred at the window" suggest only the dangers of the furnace which threatens to engulf her. In both poems, Sylvia is caught on the edge of some horror and is quite separate from Ted who, since their paths diverged earlier in the Birthday Letters sequence, has been her "nurse and protector"⁹ although unaware of the real direction of the path she is treading. Sylvia, like the tiny orphan bird they once found and fed (SPJ 4 July 1958), only seems to thrive, plays "at feeling safe", but is closer to death than either of them know.

Only in Ted's poem is the horror associated directly with Sylvia's writing which, like a "prison report", will reveal the dark energies which inspire her and which overturn all ordinary, conventional judgement so that "Wrong is right, right wrong". And there are two possible meanings to this last line of Ted's poem. Firstly, Sylvia was inspired by the Ariel spirit to write poetry and prose which flouted conventional standards of right behaviour by publicly expressing rage and hatred towards her mother, her father and her husband. Secondly, on this particular Cabbalistic path the dual nature of the Goddess may reverse any judgement of right and wrong, for she embodies both. Only when the quester has reached the very end of their journey will she make her judgement of their fitness to be allowed beyond her veil into the infinite presence of the Divine. At that point, the quester who has taken the wrong path will certainly discover that what they thought was wrong is right, and right wrong.

So, in these four poems, Ted recreates situations in which Sylvia accepts, adopts, transmits and is subject to the energies of the High Priestess. But she is heedless of the dangers. And, as these and other poems in Birthday Letters show, there is an unbalanced mixture of naivety, recklessness, compulsion and arrogance in the way in which she uses the energies which the Goddess inspires in her. For this reason, her journey was directed towards the underworld of Saturn, the Father, rather than towards the heavenly Source.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Shekinah is not universally accepted within Judaism and her presence is still the subject of serious debate. The same applies to what is known as 'The Problem of Evil' and the representation of the female as the source of evil. These debates are extremely complex and my understanding of them is limited. What I write here of sacred Jewish lore is drawn from many sources and must be seen as my own general interpretation of commonly expressed ideas, especially those which were in some way adopted into Christian Cabbala by Renaissance scholars, and those more generally expressed in mythology.

2. Donya Feuer, writes that in 1989 Ted, when writing a new introduction to his *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (Faber, 1991), asked her to sum up, in a letter, discussion she had been having with him about Shakespeare over the past year. Then, between 23 April and 14 June, Ted wrote fifty-four letters to her, "prefaced with short notes". "these letters became this book," Ted wrote in the forward to *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. (Fuer, 'In the Company of Shakespeare and Ted Hughes', in *The Epic Poise*, Faber, London 1999, pp.118-121).

3. In *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, Ted lists the four ethical fundamental aims of Cabbala: "... to achieve harmony between the fixed and the free, between the severe formal powers of Judgement and the flowing spontaneous powers of Mercy;... to achieve the sacred marriage, the conjunction of masculine and feminine;... to redeem the Shekina from the abyss of the demons [which is also] the Divine Spirit... immersed in material existence;... to attain mastery over... the demonic powers of the abyss". In his new 'Note' for *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (pp.165-203), Ted also discussed Occult Hermetic Neoplatonism and Cabbala (neither of which were mentioned in the 'Introduction' to the 1971 edition), and it is apparent that he had become very familiar with Mircea Eliade's work and that of Frances Yates on the subject.

4. All those things about Occult Hermetic Neoplatonism and Cabbala which Ted suggested would have interested Shakespeare are present in *Birthday Letters*. In particular, there is the layered multiplicity of meanings in each image "consistent with the meanings of a unified system"; the "as-if-actual visualization" as a way of meditating on events, which occurs in poem after poem in snapshots, flashes of light and in the direct and simple way in which he addresses Sylvia; and there is the "idea of meditation as a conjuring", by the "ritual magic" of poetry, "figures with whom conversations can be held" (SGCB 33).

5. 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester', from Keynes, G (Ed), *The Poetical Works of Rupert Brooke*, Faber, London, 1955.

6. Dr John James, an Australian architect, has made a detailed, scholarly study of Chartres and other Mediaeval cathedrals in the Paris Basin. He has identified the work

of particular Masters within the cathedrals and has shown, in detail, how they incorporated sacred number theory into the structure of the cathedrals. Three of his books are of particular interest here: Chartres: The Masons who Built a Legend, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982; The Contractors of Chartres, Vol.II, Mandalora Publications, Wyong, Australia, 1981; and, more general but with excellent notes on history, symbolism and its meaning, The Traveller's Guide to Medieval France, Harrap Columbus, London, 1987.

7. Cynganedd grew from an ancient Welsh Bardic verse form, the cwydd: 30-100 lines of seven syllable rhyming couplets with multiple alliteration. This form was adapted by Dafydd ap Gwilym (1325-1380) and became immensely popular (Nichols, R. The Book of Druidry, Harper Collins, London, 1992, pp.72-3). Robert Graves provides an example in The White Goddess, Faber, London 1977, p.18.

8. The Blackbird is a common folk-lore symbol of the devil or one of his demons.

9. In a letter in the archive of Ted Hughes's papers at Emory University, Ted wrote to Sylvia's mother: "The main talk and business of our days was how Sylvia should get to the point of at last writing what she wanted to write. We did nothing that wasn't meant to promote that. We assumed that my writing would carry on anyhow, somehow". Quoted by James Bone, The Times, Saturday April 8, 2000 2W p.10.

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Empress cardDaleth path
The Path of The Empress - Daleth

Tarot card 3. Tree path 4.

Joining Sephiroth 2 (Chokmah) and 3 (Binah)

'Visit', 'Wuthering Heights', 'A Dream', 'Totem'.

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Path number four, The Path of The Empress, is the third path of the Supernal Triangle and it is the last path the journeyer will take before crossing the Abyss which lies between the supernal realms and the paths of the lower Trees.

In the Hebrew alphabet, the letter which represents this path is Daleth (Door or Portal) and, in Cabbala, it signifies the door to the material world in which we live: the way to experience, to knowledge and to maturity. Path number four is the path which joins Wisdom (Chokmah 2) and Understanding (Binah 3) and in mystical orders it is the Door to Initiation and Illumination.

Four is also the number of God the Creator; the Tetragrammaton; the Logos; the Word; the Eternal Principle of Creation.

And four is the number of Earth and of the alchemical 'Mothers' - Fire, Air, Water and Earth - of which all Earthly things are made. We still speak of four seasons, four directions, the four corners of the Earth and, in astrology, of the four Fixed Signs of the zodiac: Leo, Aries, Taurus and Scorpio.

Sephira number four (Chesed: Love; Humility), whilst not on The Path of The Empress, transmits to the journeyer on the Cabbalistic paths those divine energies of the lightning flash which are associated with the number four. Chesed is on the Pillar of Mercy, and the Spiritual Vision associated with it is the Vision of Love: love freely and humbly given. Its negative aspects are those of excessive love - love which is not balanced by judgement: intoxication, debauchery, possessiveness, tyranny, iconoclasm and dogma. The planet associated with Chesed is Jupiter, but four is also the number of Venus, the Goddess of Love.

All these are traditional Cabbalistic attributes of the number four, Daleth.

In the Tarot, however, the number of The Empress's card is three and she is another form of the Great Goddess. Whereas The High Priestess represents judgement and intuition, The Empress is the Earth Mother, the Soul enthroned in Nature, the workings of Heaven on Earth. She is all unrestrained emotion: love, passion, anger, jealousy, joy and sorrow. She is a voluptuous, sensual and sexual Venus; a fecund and fruitful Ceres; a Demeter of domesticity and maternal care; and a Cybele, Aphrodite, Isis or Mary mourning for her lost son or lover.

The sexual powers of The Empress are enthralling and her maternal powers are selfless and constant. But she is still the many-throned, many-wiled Goddess who combines the highest spiritual energies with the lowest and most material. Her number is three, and that of her path is four. She combines the energies of both numbers and her path, like that of The High Priestess, teaches the need for balance and for understanding but this is to be found through love rather than through intuition.

In the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the epigrams for meditation on The Path of The Empress (Daleth) are "The Wife; Alchemical Salt; The Gate of the equilibrium of the Universe".

The fourth poem in Birthday Letters, 'Visit' (BL 7), is the poem on The Path of The

Empress in the Atziluthic World. And the first thing to note about this poem is that it is out of sequence with the chronological order of actual events.

Sylvia's journal entries for March 10 and 11, 1956 (SPJ) both describe a night-time visit made by Ted and his friend, Lucas Myers, to throw "stones" and "mud" at a window which they mistakenly thought was hers. These same entries also contain her fervent prayers that Ted would come and meet her: "Please let him come; let me have him for this British spring. Please please". In 'Visit', Ted also describes all this, but the position of the poem in the Birthday Letters sequence and the poem itself, where Ted describes himself ambiguously as "unknown to you, and not knowing you", suggest that Ted and Sylvia had yet to meet. In fact, they had met at the St Botolph's party just two weeks before, as Sylvia's journal entry for February 26th confirms. It was unlikely, too, that Ted would have forgotten this meeting since, as he describes in 'St Botolph's' (BL 14) (three poems after 'Visit'), Sylvia had bitten him so hard on the cheek that her teeth marks had branded his face "for the next month".

In the pattern of the Cabbalistic journey, however, 'Visit' fits precisely. And the second thing to note, (I do not believe that this is coincidence) is that Ted brings together, in the opening lines of the poem, the numbers one, three and four: these represent, in the Tarot, The Magician, The Empress and The Emperor - all that is necessary for creation on Earth.

The number one appears in the very first line of the poem, just as it appears at the very top of the Cabbalistic Tree. And it is associated specifically with Lucas: "Lucas, my friend, is one". One is the number of The Magician / Mercury, the guide who may also be a trickster. It was Lucas who guided Ted to a window in the Newnham College where Sylvia lived, but it was the wrong window. The name 'Lucas', too, like the Latin word 'lucis' and the Greek word 'leukos' (both meaning 'light') links this friend with Lucifer (literally, 'light bearer'), Phosphorous and Mercury, all guides and bearers of light and spirit who move between Heavenly and Earthly realms¹.

Like the inert alchemical element, Salt, which is associated with Daleth and The Path of The Empress and which needs Mercury to activate it, Ted is waiting in his "chrysalis" for the moment when he will "leap to freedom". Sylvia, too, as her journal entry shows, is waiting, "spiderlike", restless, and "quivering like polished barbwire", for a new path². Both were fired with the thought of the other: Ted, like "inflammable celluloid"; Sylvia, "burning, fevered". And both are driven by emotion, not logic. Passion, earthy darkness, love, motherhood and loss are everywhere in the poem. So, too, are the creative words, both Ted's and Sylvia's, which are part of their story³.

But Ted's search was still like "blind-man's-buff": still like a blindfolded child's game of catch. He did not really know the person he was seeking when he stood in that garden at Sylvia's College, nor, even, did he know that he was "missing" her. And the suggestion of his being on the threshold of maturity (like an initiate on the path of Daleth) is there in the image of a chrysalis, and in his weekend recidivism to his Alma Mater, the 'Bounteous Mother' which was the Cambridge College, Pembroke, from

which he graduated.

Sylvia, however, on March 10, 1956 suddenly knew passionately that she wanted Ted. In her journal entry for that day, she wrote that she wanted to “have” him: to possess him, if only “for this British Spring”. She wanted him, just as Ted says, as “the male lead in her drama”. Her joy, prayers, panic, nightmare and despair, described by Ted in ‘Visit’, are vivid in her journal, where her emotions became words which she committed to paper, seemingly without restraint. As if, as Ted tells her in his poem, they “floated out through your throat and tongue and onto your page”.

This raw emotion, and the sudden shock and the pain of loss which Sylvia’s words brought to Ted, reading them ten years after her death, are powerfully re-created in ‘Visit’ by her daughter’s sudden question, “Daddy, where’s Mummy?”. Ted calls Frieda “your daughter”, combining the female energies and linking her so closely with Sylvia in the lines of the poem that there is a confusion of past and present which mirrors his own confusion when Frieda spoke. Suddenly, the whole story is there in a midnight of frost and numbness which encompasses both the garden with which the poem and the story began and Ted’s own continuing pain. But buried there, too, like the continuing life-force hidden in a chrysalis, is “A pulse of fever” with which Ted links past, present and future.

That pulse of fever was there in the “numbness of earth” that midnight in the Newnham garden. It was there under the shock and the pain of loss caused by Sylvia’s words, and in the silent house when their daughter asked her terrible question. It was there in the attraction which drove Ted and Sylvia to seek each other out. And it is there, still, in the daughter who carries her parents’ genes. Most importantly, it was and is there in the words both Ted and Sylvia wrote and which still carry their creative power into the life of each reader.

In ‘Visit’, Ted brought together all the elements of “Your story, my story” and all the energies he would need to recreate this story in poetry as a Cabbalistic journey, including the pulse of fever necessary to give it life and bring it to maturity. And for the reader who first encounters this poem on the printed page at the start of the Birthday Letters sequence, it is the beginning of a story in which Ted’s and Sylvia’s futures are still “waiting to happen”.

Finally, this story from the archetypal World of Atziluth is also the human story. It is the story of passion, love, marriage, parenthood, death and sorrow which is the story of life itself. It is your story and it is my story.

‘Wuthering Heights’ (BL 59), the poem on The Path of The Empress in the World of Briah, is one of the most beautiful poems in Birthday Letters.

The energies in it - The Alchemical ‘Mothers’: Fire, Air, Water and Earth, which are the Goddesses destructive and creative powers - swirl and bubble like the “witch-brew boiling in the sky vat” of the poem ‘Moors’ in Remains of Elmet (ROE 19, THSP 160). And it is these Elmet moors above the Yorkshire village of Stanbury which are the

setting for this poem.

Once again, as in 'Visit', creative words are important. And again Mercury appears as the guide in the very first line of the poem. This time Walter, Ted's uncle, "is guide". His energies, sparked by Sylvia's huge, "transatlantic" (an ambiguous use of the word) elation, effervesce like "his rhubarb wine kept a bit too long" - a lovely image, which captures Walter's age, with its rich "vintage" of tradition, "legends and gossip", and his rhubarb-sharp estimation of writers as "pathetic people. Hiding from it / And making it up"⁴.

Sylvia, in turn, is inspired by Walter's words, which evoke the memory of another poet, Emily Brontë, who long ago climbed this same steep track to the open moor.

Mimicking their climb, the poem moves from Haworth Rectory and its associated images of death and of dark, "dwarfish", "elvish" human handiwork, to the skyline and the windswept, wuthering⁵, heights of Emily's "private Eden", ("her Paradise", Ted called it in *Remains of Elmet*, ('Emily Brontë' ROE 96)). In a talk published in *The Listener* in 1963 ('The Rock', 19 Sept. pp.421-3), Ted spoke of the "exultant" mood of the high moors and of the lasting effect on him of childhood climbs from the dark Yorkshire valley up onto the moor, where light is

[a]t once both gloomily purplish and incredibly clear, unnaturally clear, as if objects there had less protection than elsewhere, were more exposed to the radio-active dangers of space.

Now, in 'Wuthering Heights', as he, Sylvia and Walter climb, the moor opens for Sylvia like "a dark flower". And in its strange light, all human endeavour "wither[s] into perspective", so that all that remains of the "incomings and outgoings" of centuries of people is "a rubble of stone and sheep-droppings".

The echoes of *Remains of Elmet* are very strong in this poem, and there are many poems and many photographs in that earlier sequence (and in the later *Elmet*⁶) which complement and illustrate this poem in *Birthday Letters*. In particular, 'Two Photographs of Top Withens' (E 19); and 'These Grasses of Light' / 'Stanbury Moor' (ROE 16 / E 20), 'Open to Huge Light' / 'Two Trees at Top Withens' (ROE 17 / E 21), 'Top Withens' (ROE 103), 'Emily Brontë' (ROE 96 / E 94), 'Haworth Parsonage' (ROE 100), and 'Light Falls Through Itself' (ROE 112).

In 'Wuthering Heights' (BL 59), as in *Remains of Elmet*, Ted evokes a landscape in which past lives and past hopes have succumbed to the forces of nature. But in this poem on *The Path of The Empress* this is seen as a prelude to what Sylvia would create from it all in her writing: how she, so full here of new life and hope and energy, "would take up now the clench of that struggle". Sylvia did, in fact, describe this day in a letter to her mother (2 Sept. 1956), and there the landscape is sunny and romantic, very different to Ted's picture of it in this poem. She did, indeed, see it with new and hopeful eyes, and she "breathed it all in" and was inspired by it.

In brief notes in her journal (SPJ Appendix 10, 31[a], following the entry for 26 Aug. 1956) she wrote: "Mrs. Mehan - rich-flavoured dialect story. [sic] set in Yorkshire (Wuthering Heights background)"; and "drama of Cathy & Heathcliff". She listed things associated with the Brontës which she probably saw at Haworth Rectory on the day of her climb: including "Anne - ms - 41/2 x 35/8 poems", "Sofa - Emily died - 19th Dec. 1848"(31[b]); "Charlotte's needlework"(32[a]); "Charlotte - tiny black satin slippers"(32[b]). All these, she put together in a prose poem on 9 August (SPJ Appendix 10. 42[b]) headed "Withens", where she describes the two routes to Top Withens and imagines "The furious ghosts nowhere but in the heads of visitors & the yellow-eyed shag sheep".

Shortly after this, early in 1957, Sylvia captured the spirit and light of the moors in two poems: 'Two Views of Withens' (SPCP 71-2) and 'Carbuncle' (SPCP 72-3). And in September 1961, perhaps after more long walks on the Yorkshire moors (SPJ 24 Dec. 1960), she wrote a stronger, more personal poem, 'Wuthering Heights' (SPCP 167), which appears amongst other poems of her Ariel period.

Ted, too, wrote a poem about Emily Brontë (ROE 96 / E 94) but also another poem, 'Two Photographs of Top Withens' (E 19) (quite unlike Sylvia's 'Two Views of Withens'), which again tells the story of their climb from Stanbury with Ted's Uncle Walter. In this poem, a snapshot taken of Sylvia on that day shows her sitting "in one of the sycamores". But the mood is grim and "Even the spirit of the place, like Emily's," is "Hidden beneath stone" and scoured by "the mad and empty windv. Now, in this Elmet poem written years after the event, the ruined house at Top Withens has lost the charm which made Sylvia want to "buy it and renovate it!": it is "weatherproofed, / Squared with Water Authority concrete, a roofless / Pissoir for sheep and tourists". But the sycamore trees, linked with Sylvia in the first and last stanzas of the poem, are still there. And her "ghost" - "held (for that moment)" by the camera - became the photograph mentioned in the poem: which is a beautifully poetic description of the photographic process.

In 'Wuthering Heights' in Birthday Letters, the mood is quite different, and the sycamore trees stand (like two pillars) in the middle of the poem: two healthy old trees (with the "girth and spread of valley twenty-year-olds") of a species identified in mythology with the Tree of Life and with The Goddess and fertility. Here, associated with Sylvia's inspiration and her "globe-circling" aspirations, almost exactly in the middle of the poem, the sycamore trees mark the beginning of a change of mood which culminates in an alchemical mixture of images embodying air, water, fire, and earth. The moor-wind, the clouds, the fever which fidgets the heath-grass, and the stone, all are brought together in the warm, "lucent" body of Sylvia, whose poem "unfurled" from her naturally, like a "frond of hair from her nape".

The alchemical images in the poem are linked, too, with the spirits which are present in all Sylvia's and Ted's writing about this day: the ghosts of the people who tried to make a life on those moors; the Brontë ghosts (especially that of Emily, and perhaps of her heroine Cathy, behind the "broken mullions"); and also (in Ted's poems) the ghost of Sylvia - both in the poem itself and also as Ted evokes her as he addresses the poem

to her. In the concentration of energies which Ted achieves in the last twelve lines of the poem, the ghost of "that earlier one" flames with jealousy (like a jealous goddess), but is "quenched" in "understanding" - as if in sudden realisation that Sylvia is the new, living vehicle for the same active, creative energies which once were hers. 7.

So, the alchemy of this poem has moved Sylvia and Ted along the Cabbalistic Path of Initiation - The Path of The Empress - in this windy, watery World of Briah, from the Wisdom (Chokmah) of facts and knowledge with which it began to the threshold of Understanding (Binah) and inspiration with which it ends. "Understanding", significantly, is the final word of the poem.

The symbolism of an initiate on the threshold of new understanding is present, too, in 'A Dream' (BL 118) which is the poem on The Path of The Empress in the World of Yetzirah. 'A Dream' follows 'The Gypsy' (BL 116), which recounts the curse of the old gypsy woman at Rheims and suggests Sylvia's own embodiment of the Goddess's powers. 'A Dream' also directly precedes 'The Minotaur' (BL 120), as if we now stand at the entrance to the Labyrinth. There are other labyrinths associated with this poem, too.

Many aspects of this poem, and of the period of Sylvia's life with which it is chronologically associated, reinforce Ted's continuing association of her with the Goddess. In 'Visit' she was a seductive Venus; in 'Wuthering Heights' she was on the threshold of her role as Wife; and in 'A Dream' she is Mother. But again the poem is closely concerned with the power of the creative word - the logos - and with initiation, doorways and thresholds, and rites-of-passage.

By late 1961, Sylvia was a mother, fiercely proud of her small daughter and pregnant again with Nicholas, who would be born on 17th January, 1962. Earlier in 1961 she had suffered a miscarriage (SPJ 6 Feb. 1961); and she had undergone an appendectomy, notes of which she included in her journal as source material for her writing. Most importantly, between March 18th and August 22nd she completed the first draft of her autobiographical novel⁸, *The Bell Jar*, in which she recreated her past as the life of the fictional Esther Greenwood. In the words of the cover blurb on the Bantam Paperback edition (1975), *The Bell Jar* is "The Heartbreaking Story of a Talented Young Woman who descends into Madness".

This was the novel Sylvia had dreamed of writing and had struggled for so long to create. She wrote it "at high speed and in great exhilaration" ('Sylvia Plath and her Journals', WP 185), and the date on which she completed it is inscribed in the margin of some typed notes which she made in December 1958 (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958) and in which she asks "why don't I write a novel?": the margin note reads - "I just have! August 22 1961: THE BELL JAR", and Sylvia has signed it.

It seems likely, then, that Sylvia re-read these journal notes in 1961 and that their contents were fresh in her mind at that time. They are extraordinarily uninhibited, emotional and frank notes of a meeting with her psychotherapist, Ruth Beuscher; and they deal with her view of her mother and her mixed feelings of hate, pity and love for

her; her love of her “ogre” father, and the circumstances of his death; her own “Panic Bird” of fear about not writing; her thoughts about men; her own flouting of her mother’s expectations and rules, and her guilt over this, then her anger at that guilt; her love of Ted; and her view of writing as “a religious act”, a necessity: “the worst thing,” she wrote, “worse than all of them, would be to live without writing” (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958). In the same entry, she also noted other fears: “fear of writing: why fear? Fear of not being a success?”; and “Fear of losing male totem: what roots?”.

All of these things seem to be part of the background to Ted’s poem ‘A Dream’; part of Sylvia’s dream (which Ted shared); and part of the poem’s puzzles and its labyrinth of associations which she gives him, finally, to “think about”.

In many ways, the poem is just like the dream it describes. It is full of fragmentary images from the subconscious which seem to have no logical connection with each other. And interpreting dreams is notoriously difficult. My suggestions about this poem, then, are just that: suggestions. They are based on Sylvia’s writing at that time; on some of Ted’s writing; and on what I believe to be the position of this poem on the Cabbalistic Trees. As with all dreams, there can be many interpretations.

Two dreams recorded in those same journal notes of December 1958 seem relevant to this poem. The first, recorded on December 27th, was closely connected with Sylvia’s anxieties and fears of loss and failure. In that journal entry, Sylvia referred to frequent childhood nightmares of losing her mother, and to the loss of her father and his love, then she wrote:

I dreamed the other night of running after Ted through a huge hospital, knowing he was with another woman, going into mad wards and looking for him everywhere: what makes you think it was Ted? It had his face but it was my father, my mother. Was this the “worst dream” which in ‘A Dream’ “came true”? Do the opening lines of the poem (which in the chronology of Birthday Letters corresponds with the period shortly before Ted and Sylvia moved to Devon) refer to the “ring on the door-bell” which led to Ted’s first meeting Assia Wevill and Sylvia’s eventual separation from him?

Possibly. But there is another “horror” dream recorded in Sylvia’s notebook on January 8th 1956, which seems more closely associated with the images in ‘A Dream’ of an opened coffin and a message from a dead father. This dream, from which Sylvia “woke screaming”, is full of open graves and “of the deformed and dead, alive as we are, and [she is] among them, in the filth and swarming corruption of the flesh”. Following this description, Sylvia wrote: “I feel, am mad as any writer must in one way be: why not make it real?”. And, in a sense, that is what she did and that is what Birthday Letters shows her doing: trying to get back to her dead father (cf. ‘Daddy’, SPCP 222-4) (a process which she seriously began in those psychotherapy session with Ruth Beuscher in 1958); raising him (as she has in ‘The Bee God’ (BL 150)) and reassembling him in her poetry; visiting him - her “Ogre” - in the forty-ninth chamber of her dream palace in the abyss; and finally joining him in death.

'A Dream' suggests Sylvia's first disturbing contact with her dead father. And the stars which Ted said "governed a life" (or was it Sylvia who said it in 'Words' (SPCP 270)?) are the "fixed stars" which led her to seek and make that contact: the stars of her birth; the "ill-starred" Scorpion of 'Electra on Azelea Path' (SPCP 103). These were the stars which determined her character and drove that "thirst of the whole being" which Ted elsewhere divined in her poetry as a thirst for the whole being - a thirst for "the birth of her new creative self" (WP 182).

In 'A Dream', Daddy asked to stay with her. For Ted, such a request from Sylvia's father was "a command", but to call it that suggests notions of filial duty, rather than freely given love. And it was, of course, an un-natural request.

In reality, lifting the lid of the coffin (which metaphorically was what Sylvia's psychotherapist encouraged her to do) released an anger which was fed into all Sylvia's writing. It fed into her novel, her journal and her poetry, in words which by 1963 she saw as "Axes" ('Words', SPCP 270) and weapons of destruction which had brought about all the losses she feared. She saw, too, that words were powerless against the "fixed stars" which "Govern a life". In Sylvia's poem 'Words' and in 'A Dream', this phrase is identical, even to the placement of the line break, so the poems are closely linked. Sylvia's journey, then, had led to words which were destructive rather than creative.

For Sylvia, the most important words she wrote in 1961 were those of *The Bell Jar*. This was the novel she had always longed to write, the achievement through which she would fulfil her own ambitions and those her mother had for her. Into this novel, as into the Breton jug in 'A Dream', she poured everything in her struggle for a new creative self. That Ted saw this novel as a rite-of-passage in Sylvia's progress towards achieving her true poetic voice, is apparent in his suggestion that in 1961 "perhaps something like *The Bell Jar* had still to be faced and got through" before the Ariel voice became discernible (WP 186). But, in its cruel representation of Esther Greenwood's mother, this novel was like a gift of "shards, crude stars" for Aurelia Plath.

In 'A Dream', the imagery of the shattered Breton jug is closely linked to Ted's vivid picture of Sylvia with Chartres hung about her face like "a mantilla / Blackened, a tracery of char - / As after a firestorm". This is an interesting image for Ted to have "salvaged". It suggests that he had saved something of value from a scene of destruction; and if the Breton jug does represent Sylvia's writing of *The Bell Jar*, maybe it suggests that she emerged phoenix-like from those creative and destructive fires.

Crypt picture

Whether or not this is what Ted intended, the image does link Sylvia closely with the Goddess / Empress and, interestingly, with a labyrinth. Chartres Cathedral is another Gothic cathedral dedicated to Notre Dame (Our Lady) and designed and built by the same Master Builders who later worked on Rheims Cathedral. Chartres was for centuries the most important place of pilgrimage in France for those seeking help from The Virgin Mother. It was built according to the same sacred geometry based on numbers as Rheims; and it was erected on a site once dedicated to the pagan

Goddess. The oldest part of Chartres Cathedral is the crypt, which is built round a sacred well and is called (in a modern guidebook) “the martyrium”, because Christians were once martyred there. The crypt was the “original heart of pilgrimage to Our Lady, who was particularly invoked by pregnant women” (Houvet, Chartres Cathedral, 1996)⁹ and it was the home of the church’s most sacred relics.

The church at Chartres has risen from the flames many times, so the charred image of it in ‘A Dream’ could have many origins. The first 4th Century Christian church was burned down in 743; Danish pirates razed it in 858; and it was destroyed again by fires in 1020 and 1134. But the fire of 1194, which also destroyed much of the town and was recorded in a poetic chronicle written by Philippe le Breton some time between 1218 and 1224, was the first fire to affect the Gothic building which had been begun in 1134. It spared only the crypt and the smoke-blackened towers and façade which still exist today. In this fire, too, a sacred relic - The Veil of The Virgin - was thought lost but was unearthed after four days. Whether or not the Veil of the Virgin looked like a charred mantilla is a matter of imaginative speculation, but its rediscovery did persuade reluctant townspeople to begin rebuilding the church, so that Our Lady of Chartres rose again, phoenix-like, from the firestorm of 1194.

Maze picture

The charred, mantilla-like tracery of Chartres which surrounds Sylvia’s head in ‘A Dream’, is reminiscent of the turreted crown usually worn by the Goddess Athena, and by The Empress in the oldest tarot packs. But an even closer link between the Goddess / Empress and Chartres Cathedral is to be found in the great labyrinth, constructed according to the sacred numbers associated with The Virgin, and set into the floor of the Cathedral nave in about 1200 AD. In the centre of this labyrinth there was, originally, a metal plaque depicting Theseus, the Minotaur, and Ariadne holding her ball of thread.¹⁰

Certainly, the puzzle which Ted gives us in ‘A Dream’ is as strange as the dream which Sylvia gave to him to “think about”. And, especially as the very next poem in the Birthday Letters sequence is called ‘The Minotaur’ (BL 120), there is a strong suggestion that Ted and Sylvia were, at that moment in their lives, on the threshold of a dark labyrinth.

In the lowest World of Assiah, ‘Totem’, the poem on The Path of The Empress, also represents a threshold. This is the last poem in the Birthday Letters sequence in which Ted and Sylvia are together; and in the chronology of actual events the time to which it refers is March to April of 1962, only a few months before Ted and Sylvia agreed to a legal separation (SPLH 27 Aug. 1962).

In March, 1962, Sylvia wrote to her mother of her plan to paint “a design of hearts and flowers” on the playroom furniture in her Devon home (SPLH 12 March 1962). And a month later she wrote that doing this painting had cheered her up (SPLH 2 April 1962). Aurelia Plath, remembering her arrival at the house later that year wrote:

The threshold of the guest room I was to occupy had an enameled pink heart and a

garland of flowers painted on it. (Note pre. 17 August 1962).

But she also wrote that “the marriage was seriously troubled and there was a great deal of anxiety in the air”.

Sylvia painted hearts over the blackness - her own and that of her possessions: they were “the crimson on the black”, which in ‘Totem’ is both hope and fear (lamp and “blood-splash”). The heart was her “logo” - her symbol of magical power, and a sadly debased symbol of love.

The word ‘logo’, a modern, commercialised, debased form of ‘logos’, neatly conveys the mixture of sacred and profane which such a talisman represents, and the degradation of divine energies which had occurred. Sylvia’s painted hearts, in ‘Totem’, are like the Cross of the Emperor Constantine, which symbolized both to the divine vision which brought about the Emperor’s conversion to Christianity and led him to create things of great beauty, and the iconic symbol of the worldly marriage of Church and State which he eventually arranged.

In ‘Visit’ the energies from the Divine Source were experienced directly and flowed strongly and freely into Sylvia’s words. In ‘Wuthering Heights’, they were mediated by Mercury and emerged in poetry which “unfurled” from Sylvia naturally, “like a loose curl”. In ‘A Dream’, further from the Source, the energies were embodied in sacred relics and icons (which, as at Chartres, retain some reputed miraculous powers), but Sylvia’s created words were uglier and more destructive. Here, in the lowest World of Assiah, where the energies of the Source are weaker and those of the Underworld stronger, Sylvia reached for charms, amulets and superstitious magic both to attract her Genie and for protection. Her poetry flowed, but it flowed as if from an open wound. And everything - poetry, love, hate, hope, fear, anger, sorrow and joy - came from her heart. The painted heart symbolized it all.

The double meaning of the red heart prevails throughout the poem. As a mundane symbol, it has always represented the powers of the Goddess / Empress, which can be both creative and destructive. In ‘Totem’, too, it is both. It is mother love, painted on a doll’s cradle and on the threshold “over which [Sylvia’s] son entered”. It is creative love decorating the mirror in which Sylvia finds her reflection, just as she is mirrored in her writing. It is Genie spirit, “Guardian Angel”, the source of all that keeps her whole: as her writing does. But it is also the “Demon-Slave”, the over possessive “Fish-mother” (not the more commonly heard, colloquial, ‘fish-wife’) who is like all the goddesses whose sons (Jesus, Osiris, Ichthys and others) represent resurrection and fertility.

Sylvia’s Demon-Slave was her writing, the love of her life. And the spirit which “possessed” her, the Genie which inspired her and spoke with Ariel’s voice, was an angry, destructive spirit whose unbalanced energies eventually destroyed her. “The blood jet is poetry”, she wrote: and, ambiguously, “There is no stopping it” (‘Kindness’ SPCP 269-70). And the same sense of inevitability pervades her own poem entitled ‘Totem’ (SPCP 264-5) which she wrote in January 1963.

Ariel's heart and voice, as heard in Sylvia's poems, was jealous, possessive, angry, and only sometimes warmly loving: not the balanced, freely given love which must be learned if The Empress's Path from Wisdom to Understanding is to be negotiated successfully. In the end, what had seemed like a welcome poetic re-birth was a devouring and dangerous energy, and Sylvia paid for it with her life. Her Ariel book, all that we have of that re-birth into which she poured her heart, is the empty mask of her Genie, Ariel. And the painted hearts, now, are only the "spoor", like a cold, empty trail of blood, which tells of Sylvia's life, love, fears, hopes and desires. They are all that is left of everything which once possessed her, and then devoured her. No stronger expression is possible of the dangers of The Path of The Empress (Daleth). Yet, on this same path, if a true understanding of love and of the power of the word is learned, the Initiate may achieve Illumination

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. In a letter to me (19 Jan. 2001), Lucas Myers wrote that his birth sign is Gemini, so, "Ted delighted in emphasising my double and mercurial character". He describes that particular night's events in his own memoir of Ted and Sylvia: Crow Steered Bergs Appeared.
2. Sylvia writes, specifically, of the need to "plot and manage and manipulate my path" (SPJ 10 March 1956).
3. That Sylvia's journal entries were as much a literary creation as any of her other prose or poetry, is clear from the way she describes her writing (in this same journal entry for 10 March 1956) as "the small ordered word patterns I make". And it is a shock to read her entries for 6 March 1956, where she expresses devouring love and passion for Richard Sassoon in a letter which she seems to have copied into her journal, then, only three days later, to read an outline for her novel in which she includes "letters to Sassoon, etc.". Nevertheless, Ted's indication in 'Visit' of the powerful emotions which Sylvia's journal entries roused in him, even ten years after her death, is very appropriate to this Path of The Empress, where the number four represents creation through the power of the word - the logos.
4. In Alchemy, too, Mercury combines these same corrosive and creative energies which continually break down the prima materia, purify it, and provide energy for its renewal.
- 5 'Wuthering' is a Yorkshire dialect word for bluster and commotion. It can be used to describe the weather or, disparagingly, people, as in: "He's wuthering on about his great deeds".
6. Remains of Elmet (1979) is a very different book to Elmet (1994), although many of the poems in the two books are the same. In my own book, Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest, and in my paper 'Regeneration in Remains of Elmet', I discuss the alchemical structure and purpose of Remains of Elmet. In 1994, shortly after Elmet was published,

Ted Hughes asked me what I thought of this later book. I replied that it felt to me as if he'd had quite a different purpose in *Elmet* (that he was doing something quite different to what he was doing in *Remains of Elmet* - trying to come to terms with something rather than change it) and that the carefully placed cross in Fay Godwin's final photograph made me feel that the book had completed something for him. His response was a heartfelt "Yes!" - nothing more.

7. Keith Sagar reads this poem rather differently. In a letter to me (17 Feb. 2001) he wrote: "I read the poem (see *The Laughter of Foxes*, Liverpool, 2000, p. 54) as a failed test on Sylvia. Walter is obviously a false guide (his only qualification being that 'his mother's cousin inherited some Brontë soup dishes'. That desecration of the Brontës seems to communicate itself to Sylvia, making her impervious to the dark spirit of the place, or making her protect herself from it with 'frisky glances and huge hope' as she appropriates the place with her 'globe-circling aspirations'. Her words, unlike Emily's, are 'brilliantly faceted' jewels, displaying themselves, as she displays herself to the camera. The ghost's envy of her is 'quenched' presumably because the ghost understands what it is all doomed to come to".

8. Stevenson, A. *Bitter Fame*, Viking, 1989. p. 213.

9. The guide book (Houvet, E. *Chartres Cathedral*, Houvet-La Crypt, Chartres, 1996) includes a photograph of 'The Virgin of the Crypt' - the oldest icon: the original was replaced after being burned in front of the church during the French Revolution when the church became a Temple to the Goddess Reason. A later icon (shown in my photograph here), is that of a Black Virgin and Child. Known as "Our Lady of the Pillar", it provides a tantalising link with the Cabbalistic goddess on her Pillar of Mercy.

10. John James gives details of the measurements of the labyrinth and its sacred numbers (1, 2, and 3, which add up to 6, which is a Perfect Number). He also notes that labyrinths (known as 'Daedali' or 'The Way to Jerusalem') can be found in other churches of that period, although without a metal plaque like the one at Chartres. (James, *The Contractors of Chartres*, Vol II, Mandalora Press, Wyong, NSW, 1981. pp. 470-3; *The Travellers Guide to Medieval France*, Harrap Columbus, London, 1987. pp. 74-5).

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalEmperor cardHe path

The Path of The Emperor - Hé

Tarot card 4. Tree path 5.

Joining Sephiroth 2 (Chokmah) and
6 (Tiphereth)

'Sam', 'The Chipmunk', 'The Minotaur', 'Robbing Myself'.

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Path number 5, the Path of The Emperor, is another path like that of The High Priestess which bridges the Great Abyss¹. It links the upper, Ideal, level of the Sephirothic Tree with the lower, Actual, levels of time, space and matter into which we humans are born and in which we live. It links Wisdom (Chokmah - 2) with Beauty, Love, The Way (Tiphereth - 6).

Five is the sacred number of life. It represents the Divine spirit entombed in matter: the sacred mystery at the heart of life: the animating Mercurial Essence. In Cabbala, five is associated with breath, inspiration and the sacred and hidden female Mysteries; and the five vowels of the language are regarded as the foci of spiritual forces. These vital, animating forces are centres of good and evil, order and chaos; they are forces of change and evolution, and they link us with the first creation of our world. The symbol for five is the Pentagram.

The letter which represents The Emperor's path in the Hebrew alphabet is Hé (Window). Through this window the fiery Sun of the Source shines down on worldly matter to create Beauty and to generate life. Through it, too, the Light of the Mother flows with pregnant power to instil in that life the embryo of love and inspiration. Hé is the path of worldly creation, of new beginnings, of birth and of novices. It is another threshold fraught, as any birth must be, with particular dangers. On this path, the journeyer who is wise will heed "the voice of his inner monitor" (Helene, Sacred Science of Numbers, DeVorss, 1997. p. 33) and trust the divine spirit within.

The Emperor's astrological sign is the Fire sign, Aries (the Ram). He is the embodiment of active, male, generative energies (the sperm which fertilizes the ovum), which are like thunder and lightning - dangerous and electrifying but also beautiful; or like the fierce flame and the warm glow of fire. He is alchemical Sulphur (golden and energising, but also corrosive) which works on mutable matter to change, fix and balance volatile mercurial energies. He is the emblem of male authority in our world: he is Father, Husband, Law-maker.

Just as The Empress's numbers were both 4 and 3, so The Emperor's numbers are both 5 and 4. The position in which The Emperor's body is shown in traditional Tarot packs demonstrates this. His head and arms form an equilateral triangle (which represents the supernal triangle of numbers 1, 2 and 3) below which his crossed legs represent the bisected lines of the number 2. Together, a triangle surmounting a cross

forms the alchemical sign for Fire, and the numbers thus represented add up to five. Also in the traditional Tarot packs, The Emperor is shown with the sceptre, orb and shield which represent worldly power. So, since four is the number of worldly stability (represented by a closed square), The Emperor represents strength, stability, and the imposition of form and limits. Like Blake's Law-maker, Urizon², he creates his world according to the laws of reason. He sets limits and enforces rules and boundaries: restores order from chaos, establishes morality and self-discipline, and shapes the practical pursuit of creative goals.

Just as the archetype Male of Chokmah and the archetype Female of Binah occupy the apex of the Pillars of Force/Mercy and Form/Justice and balance and complement each other, so, the Emperor's Sephira 5 (Gevurah: Strength) and the Empress's Sephira 4 (Chesed: Love) occupy complementary and balancing positions lower down the Pillars. The traveller on The Emperor's path, then, must learn that for worldly love to be whole and beneficial it must be tempered by individual strength of mind, self-restraint and judgement. As with the creative energies of The Empress, the Emperor's powers are ambivalent: his practical strength may channel the Divine Will towards beneficial or destructive ends. So, if the lessons of the earlier paths have not been well learned and wisdom, understanding and love are not combined with his strength, the seduction of power may create cruelty, tyranny, stultifying restrictions, bigotry and the illusion of invincibility.

Suitably, the poem on the Path of the Emperor in the archetypal World of Atziluth is 'Sam' (BL 10). It is a poem which dramatically suggests the precipitous and dangerous plunge which the Cabbalistic journeyer must make across the Abyss in order to continue the journey. It is also a poem which embodies fierce, unpredictable, masculine energies.

The event which the poem describes, however, took place some months before Sylvia and Ted met. On 12 December, 1955, Sylvia had gone riding with Dick Wertz (an American friend at Cambridge) and her usually placid horse had bolted (Stevenson, *Bitter Fame*, Viking, 1989. p. 66). Ted at this time knew nothing of Sylvia, nor she of him, and the event, seemingly, has nothing to do with the Birthday Letters story except that Sylvia, much later, wrote a poem about it. Why, then, did Ted include the poem just here in the sequence?

Apart from its Cabbalistic significance (which will be discussed later), the placement of the poem may relate to entries in Sylvia's journal which do fit the chronology of events on which Birthday Letters is based. These entries were made shortly after Ted and Sylvia had first met and in them she writes of her ride on Sam and links it to a total commitment to love - but not love of Ted.

On 6 March, 1956, ten days after the breathless entry which describes her first meeting with Ted, Sylvia copied into her journal an impassioned letter to Richard Sassoon. "I love you with all my heart and soul and body", she wrote. And, "I was thinking of the few times in my life I have felt I was all alive, tensed and using everything in me: mind and

body" (SPJ 6 March 1956). Sylvia identifies one of these times as her runaway ride on Sam; also, she continues, "there are the many, many times I have given myself to that fury and death which is loving you".

Distressed and distraught as Sylvia appears to be in this long journal entry, she is patently giving herself over to the dangerous energies she describes, just as when she clung onto Sam "jarred breathless, thinking in ecstasy: "is this the way the end will be?". "I luxuriate in this", she writes. And much of the entry is consciously penned for dramatic effect, with sonorous repetitions: "... why must I only cry and freeze, cry and freeze?"; and with a stylish finale: "Come my couch. Goodnight and goodnight".

For the next few days Sylvia's energies seem to have remained turbulent. On 8 March, she briefly contemplates marrying "some young man with a brilliant father". The next day she rejoices that she "could write ten novels and vanquish gods". Then, on 10 March, only four days after her letter to Sassoon, she writes with that same intensity of her desire for Ted.

Anyone reading these journal entries can feel Sylvia's headlong plunge forward and the sort of "bounced and dangling anguish" which Ted imagines for her in the poem 'Sam'. There is the same "clinging on" and the same "free-fall" with only a vestige of "steerage" left. Love and life and abandon had, indeed, become "all of a piece" (BL 10) and Sylvia, herself, likened her abandon to that of her ride on Sam during which, as she later wrote, "fear, wisdom" were "at one" with "all colours/spinning to still in his whiteness" ('Whiteness I Remember' SPCP 102).

In Ted's poem it is as if it was only this abandon which kept Sylvia from the "horribly hard, swift river" which she, in her journal entry about Sam, identified with death ("Is this the way the end will be?"). There was "luck" and an animal instinct for self-preservation, but, Ted suggests, there was also something more – some greater force that kept Sylvia alive at that time for its own purposes: "Something in you not you did it for itself"; and "Maybe your poems/ Saved themselves...".

In the final six lines of the poem, Ted seems to suggest that although Sylvia abandoned herself to the turbulent forces at that time and came safely through, she did not learn from the experience. It was "practice" but "not enough, and quite useless". So, when he himself became the cause of a similar turbulent and dangerous emotional ride for her, when he "jumped the fence" (so to speak) in their marriage, she forgot the lesson of Sam, clung to him only briefly, then threw herself off. Just such a throwing off and separation of herself from Ted is apparent in the letters Sylvia wrote to her mother after she had asked Ted to leave their Devon home (SPLH from 27 April 1962, onwards). In these, she appears fiercely proud and independent, seems to have buried her love, and is considering divorce. She is also trusting the judgement and advice of family and friends, rather than her own instincts³. The final lines of Ted's poem are an appalling description of Sylvia's suicide. In her attempt to stop the turbulent energies completely, Sylvia died, and her death effectively "tripped" Ted and brought him down too.

Such an interpretation as this is, of course, speculative. And others, certainly, have interpreted the poem differently.

One suggestion has been that 'Sam' takes as its subject Sylvia's poem, 'Whiteness I Remember' (SPCP 102), which she wrote in July 1958 and which she considered to be "a book poem" (SPJ 9 July 1958). This early poem is seen as "practice": as a trial run for her later, much better poem about another horse-ride, 'Ariel' (SPCP 239). But, whether because the poem did not achieve perfection or because Sylvia is thought to have found a 'voice' and style in this early poem but discarded it and not found it again until four years later in the Ariel poems, this early writing practice was "not enough, and quite useless". Neither of these interpretations adequately explains the last four lines of 'Sam', nor does it explain why Ted chose to single out a "quite useless" poem as his topic or to use it at just this point in the Birthday Letters sequence.

Whatever the overt, surface meaning of 'Sam', however, a Cabbalistic interpretation is still appropriate.

On the Emperor's path, the journeyer is subject to the energies of the Great Father, the All Begetter, the creator of form in the material world. The Light of the Mother, too, shines on this path through the Window (Hé) filling that world with inspiration and love. This, is the first path on which the Divine energies are manifested in the material world: the point at which Spirit becomes entombed in matter. It is a path of evolution, change, new life, new creation and the path of novices.

Sam, the horse Sylvia was given to ride, was a stallion. She describes him in 'Whiteness I Remember' as being of "tried sobriety"; a fatherly "stable-horse" suitable for "novices" (SPCP 102). Under her, however, this fatherly horse became suddenly like a Jovian Thunderbolt which carried her precipitously over (as Ted says in 'Sam') "that horribly hard, swift river" of "the cataract of macadam". Macadam is a tar-sealed road surface, but the word also means, literally, 'son of Adam'⁴. So, the cataract is not only the potential "end" which Sylvia saw and wrote of in her journal entry, it is also linked with the origin of human life and the dark river of time and death to which all life in the material world is subject. Sylvia clung on like a "baby monkey" (a hint of evolution, as well as a reference to instinct) and "Hammocked" in her body, like an embryo in the womb, were the poems she would later produce. Beneath her, as if from some Wagnerian pit, Sylvia heard "the clangour of the iron shoes", and iron, too, is an element associated with this particular Cabbalistic path because of its connection with the All Father/Jove/Zeus.

Alchemically the stallion, Sam, may be seen as the fiery Sulphurous energies which overcame the Mercurial, mutable body (that was Sylvia), and stripped it of its accumulated worldly dross so that only the gold (the vital essence, the breath of inspiration) remained in the 'temple' of the body.

Cabbalistically, Sylvia, travelling this path of Hé, survived these fiery energies long enough for them to carry her across the Abyss to a more fixed and stable place (Sam's

“stable”, as Ted ambiguously describes it). There, the embryo poems would eventually be born, but the dross of the world, as is usual for novices, would accumulate again. Sylvia had been shown ‘The Way’ of instinct and love but, at a later time (Ted suggests in ‘Sam’) when she should have remembered the lesson of that ride, she tried instead to take control and was consumed by those energies “in a flash”.

In ‘The Chipmunk’ (BL 62), the poem on the Path of the Emperor in the fluid, pattern-forming World of Briah, the flashing, energies of the Emperor are less fierce, less archetypal, more of our world. The poem is still full of energy and movement but the electrifying flash is channelled through “circuitry”: it is the flash of animal energy in the circuitry of the body, and of flashlights, flash-bulbs, a flickering film, a snapshot.

Ted and Sylvia, at this time, have figuratively crossed an Abyss – the great gulf of the Atlantic Ocean – and, like the Pilgrim Fathers before them, are beginning their new life in America “under the Cape Cod conifers” on the Massachusetts coast⁵.

On this Cabbalistic path of Hé, where the origins of life are joined to the present and the future, Ted’s chipmunk, with its pure “flowing”, “rippling, bobbing” mercurial energy, is linked from the beginning of the poem with the world of folk-stories and with “aboriginal” America. Ted calls it “the first real native” and, like a figment of the imagination, this “wood-elf” comes over roots which could be both the roots of the ancient conifers and its own (and our) primitive ancestry. Ambiguously, too, it is the “first scout” of wild game, working (like the demon weasles in Remains of Elmet (ROE 63), which it resembles in size, movement and energy) as a servant and emissary of Nature and reconnoitring the “wild game” in its territory – which, here, is Ted and Sylvia.

It sees Ted (or Ted sees it see him), as locked away from nature, trapped in the world of his book like a prisoner. And Ted, woken by its restless movement and by its “peremptory” “tail-gesture” (which suggests a deliberately provocative rudeness), recognizes exactly that disparity between the free-flowing natural energies and the caged, controlled, rational energies which he has described in the first half of this poem. He sees, too, in a momentary, instinctive chipmunk-face, which Sylvia makes in a retort to him, the orphaned, natural child beneath the controlled, sophisticated veneer which Sylvia habitually maintains.

All this happens “in a flash-still” and the result of Ted’s enlightenment is entirely consistent with the energies of this particular Cabbalistic path. Ted recognizes, like “my snapshot for life”, the instinctive, natural energies which lie imprisoned (orphaned, even) within himself and in Sylvia and which need to be nurtured. He recognizes, in other words, The Way, and he greets it with a shout of recognition. But, as always on the Path of the Emperor, there are responsibilities involved, too. The last three lines of the poem link Ted’s recognition with a promise. This promise is demanded of him by a spirit of Nature which could be the chipmunk of the poem, the “dim”, orphaned, primitive “woodland spirit” in Ted and Sylvia, and even the ghost of Sylvia’s dead father (since Sylvia had, in a sense, become an orphaned child at the age of eight when her father died). Whatever it is that requires Ted to swear “To take his orphan”, it is clearly a

masculine spirit. And, by using only the unqualified word “take”, Ted suggests the completeness of the responsibility which falls on him with this promise. Again, on this particular path, Fatherly duties and responsibilities are important and such a promise is consistent with this.

So, Ted (but not Sylvia) has been shown The Way (the Briatic pattern for future action), which is one of balance between the rude, wild, natural energies which he and Sylvia inherit (as do we all) and the rational, controlled energies which society has encouraged them, so successfully, to adopt. It is a way, too, of responsibility associated with love.

The World of Yetzirah, is the World of Formation, where patterns crystalize and become fixed. Just such ordering and fixation are already part of the Emperor/Father's nature, so one would expect his controlling powers to be strongest here on his own path, and the journeyer needs to take extra care.

In ‘The Minotaur’ (BL 120), at this lower level of the Cabbalistic Worlds, there is no clear pathway like the one which Sam took “straight down the white line of the Barton Road” in the earlier poem. Instead, there is a labyrinth of echoing tunnels and dead ends, in which is hidden a devouring monster. The ‘Mercurialv messenger, who in ‘The Chipmunk’ was a friendly wood-elf, is now a goblin – already a “cave”-dweller in the depths of Sylvia's ear - come to lure her into the labyrinth. And the energies, here, are Sulphurous, corroding energies, channelled into human anger and destruction.

Suitably, “the hammer” in line four of the poem (which can, like Jove's hammer wield the Emperor's power) is attributed to no-one. It stands, momentarily, alone before becoming the stool which Sylvia swings in “demented”, uncontrolled anger like a true daughter of Jove. And it destroys the “heirloom sideboardv which is Ted's link (in this poem) with his mother and his past. Metaphorically, the Father's powers, here, destroy the “broad plank” of stability and the inherited, continuous connection with human origins which the Mother provides.

Ted's shout, a sudden, intuitive flash as he is infected by Sylvia's anger, is uncontrolled. Only later, as he regains his self-control and orders his thoughts, does this intuition harden into a “considered”, Emperor-like directive: “Get that shoulder under your stanza's/ And we'll be away”. Intuition has shown him the way, but it is intuition distorted by anger and unbalanced by the Mother's energies: the way to which it points is the wrong way for both of them (“we'll be away”, he says).

The Cabbalistic pattern in this poem is clear: but the mythological parallels are confusing. Ted is no Ariadne: the thread he hands Sylvia in this poem is not the Goddess's silken thread of survival but a bloody skein which will lead to dark monstrous energies and to Sylvia's death. Nor, however purposeful she appears, is Sylvia Theseus entering the labyrinth to slay the Minotaur. Perhaps, because of her death, she may seem like one of young Athenian women who were annually offered to the Minotaur and devoured by it, yet the monster she seeks to join, and whom she eventually conjures wrathfully into her poetry, is her father.

The Minotaur, however, was fathered by a white bull created by the god, Poseidon, for King Minos; its mother was Parsiphae, Minos's wife. The Minotaur, therefore, has the god's Spirit entombed in a material body, which is exactly the meaning of the number 5 on this Path of the Emperor. And in this poem, where the Minotaur is both mythological monster and Sylvia's dead father, it represents the unbalanced, tyrannical powers of The Emperor/ Father's ambivalent energies⁶.

In 'Robbing Myself' (BL 165), the poem on the Emperor's path in the next, lowest, World of Assiah, Spirit is again entombed in matter. The life-giving energies lie hidden beneath the "ice-glaze hardened and polished surface" of a frozen world and there is none of the Emperor's lightning, thunder or flash. Only a "snow-blue twilight" illuminates the scene, and the Mother's latent powers lie secreted in "the old, new sleep-smell of earth" and in warmth of the overwintering crops which Ted inspects.

The poem deals clearly with actual events. In October 1962, Sylvia and Ted separated (SPCP Note p. 292). On December 12th, Sylvia, with the two children moved to London and shortly before Christmas Ted drove to Devon "to collect the red corduroy curtain material Sylvia thought indispensable for her windows" (Stevenson, Bitter Fame p. 279). Literally, the winter of December 1962, brought "the worst snow and freeze-up for fifteen years", and Ted's drive from London to Devon would have taken him over two hundred miles of road which looked both "unnatural and familiar". Literally, too, the snow through which he drove was "fallen heaven". But there is a metaphorical level to the poem, too, as is suggested by Ted's careful placement of the phrase, "cosmic disaster", so that it links his own life with the prevailing weather condition.

The icy results of a cosmic disaster were, indeed, everywhere. Ted's and Sylvia's separation totally changed their world. Metaphorically, it was a cosmic disaster the results of which Ted, in a later letter to Keith Sagar, likened to the sky's falling. It was a "cosmic disaster", too, in terms of their shared Cabbalistic journey, since all hope of completing that journey successfully were dashed. And in the shock and stress of their separation, Ted and Sylvia buried their pain and love beneath a frozen surface as they tried to regain their independence. Sylvia seemed "mostly very bright" and energetic but "she kept [Ted] firmly in the dark about her doings" (Stevenson, Bitter Fame p. 279). Ted, too, was trying to regain his independence and his equilibrium, making the "journey back into" himself and back to the natural energies which he had rejected in 'Epiphany' (BL 113).

The poem is full of the promise of Nature, the "old, new sleep-smell of earth". Winter, spring and summer, the natural cycles of time, change and renewal, all are contained in the embryonic sleep of the plants and the house to which Ted returns. The ancient house itself connects past, present and future. Its twelfth century silence; its old, familiar furniture; the memories it contains; all make it a place of colour and warmth and, above all, of promise and hope. It, too, like the tubers and the fruit which Ted "unclamps", digs up and examines, waits beneath its protective "coverlet" of snow for the changes which time will bring. This is "the nest secret" to which Ted returned. This was the intuition of

hope to which he listened in the silence of the house.

Only the gladioli bulbs, at the very heart of the poem, offer a realistic hint of things which Ted “did not know” and which would lead to loss and death. And, on this Path of the Emperor, which joins the Sephira of Wisdom with that of The Way, the things which are not known or understood are of great importance. What Ted should have known, had he balanced his intuition of the Mother’s renewing powers with his knowledge of her way, is that her way is that of love and sharing. But Ted was unwary and “did not know”. He packed potatoes and apples, Nature’s bounty, to share with Sylvia, but the hope to which he listened in the house (the promise of renewal in the house which he says “waited only for us”) he kept gloatingly to himself. And he sealed away this treasure of hope just as he sealed up the house “tight as a plush-lined casket / In a safe”. The horrible echo of death and funerals in that word ‘casket’, suggests his terrible mistake; so, too does the fact that it was ‘my’ casket, not ‘our’ casket, into which he sealed the treasure. Ironically, by the very action of secreting that hope away in his personal ‘safe casket’, rather than sharing it, he sealed it away from himself and robbed himself of the treasure.

The urge to retain power and control, which leads to secrecy and selfishness and to the jealous guarding of important information, is the dark side of the Emperor’s ambivalent powers. It is exactly this urge which Ted displays in the second half of this poem. It is suggested, too, in the eight lines set by themselves towards the end of the poem, in which Ted links the house, the casket, nature, hope and the church. Initially the glow of the sun through the windows of the church seems like a symbol of hope from within a place traditionally associated with resurrection. But the windows are “shuttered”, the glass “stained”(not coloured), and the sun is “sunk” in a place which is also a symbol of human power and control over spiritual knowledge. Every sign of hope, here, is tainted in some way. The “wintering boughs” will eventually break into bud but the sun which must effect this seems to be sunk inside the church. And the hope represented by the house is tainted by Sylvia’s sorrow. Her lonely crying, strangely, makes the house seem “newly precious” to Ted, perhaps because he saw some hope of reconciliation in her grief for a broken marriage. But although the house is “sweet with cleanliness”, as if washed clean by Sylvia’s tears, it is firmly kept that way: shut ‘tight’ as a plush lined casket which, as if to emphasise this control, is set aside, in a line on its own, “In a safe”. So, the Emperor’s controlling powers unbalance the situation. And so the treasure is lost.

Sylvia, too, of course was one of the treasures missing from the house/casket. But it makes no sense for Ted to say, as he does in the poem, that he did not know this, unless there was clear evidence that she had really gone from the house and their partnership for good. In fact, there is evidence in Sylvia’s letters that she had every intention of returning to the house; and Ted himself has said that before her death she had almost completely repaired her relationship to him⁷.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Great Abyss is generally held to lie in the region between the supernal triangle of Sephiroth 1, 2 and 3, and the lower, worldly, part of the Sephirothic Tree. Its entrance, Daath, is sometimes shown symbolically in this position as a dotted circle to distinguish it from the solid circles of the ten Divine Sephiroth. There is disagreement as to the origin and substance of the Abyss but it is generally regarded as a region of nothingness, darkness and chaos in which malign demons and spirits live. A good discussion of Daath and the Abyss can be found in Colin Low's Notes on Kabbala

2. William Blake's picture of 'God Creating the Universe' (often given the Cabbalistic title 'The Ancient of Days') shows Urizen leaning from heaven with his compasses to create the world. This image has been linked to the Book of Proverbs 8: 27-30; and also (in the Tate Gallery's William Blake Exhibition Catalogue, Tate, 200, p. 202) to chapter 8 of The Book of Daniel which, interestingly, describes Daniel's vision of a Ram (Aries' sign), the use and misuse of power, and which contains many references to the number four (all belonging to The Emperor).

3. Ruth Beuscher apparently wrote to Sylvia on September 26th counselling her to sue for divorce "whilst her husband's adultery was still hot" (Stevenson, Bitter Fame, p. 257)

4. Ted has used this ambivalent meaning of 'macadam' before in 'Tick Tock Tick Tock' in Remains of Elmet (ROE 120). (Skea, Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest, p. 204)

5. Ted and Sylvia left England by ship on 20 June 1957. By July, they were living in a cottage at Eastham, Cape Cod, which Sylvia's mother had rented for them for seven weeks as a wedding present (Stevenson, Bitter Fame, p. 111).

6. Another poem, 'The Minotaur 2', appears in Howls and Whispers (this was Cries and Whispers in early proofs) (Gehenna Press, 1998). It is a shorter poem but the energies are still Sulphurous and, again, a quarrel and Sylvia's anger become a "skein of blood" which leads her to the labyrinth, the Minotaur and death.

7. Ted wrote this in a letter to Keith Sagar which is now held in the British Library. It was quoted by Christine Patterson, 'Ted on Sylvia, for the Record', The Guardian, Saturday August 18, 2001.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalHierophant cardVau path

The Path of the Hierophant – Vau

Tarot card 5. Tree path 6.

Joining Sephiroth 2 (Chokmah) and 4 (Chesed).

‘The Tender Place’, ‘Horoscope’, ‘The Pan’, ‘Blood and Innocence’.

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The Hierophant is like a lesser, worldly form of The High Priestess. Traditionally (but not necessarily) male, the Hierophant is a channel for the Divine energies, a bridge between the Divine and the Human, a man or woman who has direct access to the Sacred Wisdom and acts as a guide, a mediator, a priestly figure who uses this Wisdom to help balancing the opposing poles of sacred and profane in our world. The hierophantic spark in each of us is that intuitive wisdom which helps us to find a balanced path between orthodox conformity and our inner sense of what is right; between the worldly self and the spiritual self.

The Hierophant's number in the Tarot is 5, the Pentacle, the number of Mankind. In traditional Tarot cards he is shown as the Pope, seated before the pillars of the Temple, which is the worldly house of the Divine spirit. Equally, he or she may be a prophet, a priest, a magus or a shaman. The Path of the Hierophant lies midway down the Pillar of Mercy and joins Sephira 2, Chokmah (Wisdom) to Sephira 4, Chesed (Mercy). Because of the numbers 2 and 4 (or 2×2), there is a strong element of duality and ambivalence to this path. There is also a strong element of sacrifice associated with the Hierophant, since (as the journeyer on this path must learn) this is the path of spiritual growth and to accept the Divine energies and allow them to flow freely through oneself to others is a dangerous and difficult task.

The number of the Hierophant's path is 6 (the sum of $2 + 4$) which is the number of Tiphereth (The Way of Love, Intuition and Divine inner knowledge). And the symbol for this path is two intersecting triangles, making a six-pointed star which appropriately suggests the inter-connection of the Supernal Triangle of 1, 2 and 3 with the worldly energies lower down the Sephirothic Tree. This symbol reflects the Hermetic/Platonic principle “As above, so below” and it is sometimes known as Solomon's Seal. Solomon, of course, was a hierophant, as were all the other spiritual guides of Biblical, historical and mythological renown.

The astrological sign for the Hierophant's path is Taurus, the Bull linking it with the Minoan Dionysus, ‘The Bull God’ of sacrifice and rebirth.

The Hebrew letter for this path, Vau (meaning ‘nail’), symbolizes both sacrifice and the steadfast link between the Divine and Mankind. It stands for the created Son, the lesser countenance of the Divine Source. We are all sons and daughters of that Source and fragments of that original Unity, thus we all carry its energies within us. Traditionally, however, the hierophant, prophet or spiritual leader is “called” to their task.

So, as befits the archetypal nature of the Atziluthic World, the first poem on the Path of the Hierophant, 'The Tender Place' (BL 12), describes the shamanic call and the dismemberment which precedes shamanic initiation. Surprising as this interpretation may seem, there are many good reasons why it should be so.

True poetry, for Ted, was always a shamanic activity, and the shamanic flight to the spirit world for the healing energies needed in our own world was, for him, "the fundamental poetic event" (Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, pp. 206-7). He certainly wrote of Sylvia's poetry in these terms in his essay 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals' (WP 177-90), where he makes it plain that Sylvia's initial task [like that of any shaman] was to heal her own "deep and incisive inner crisis". He says, too, that Sylvia had a "bee-line instinct" for what was necessary and that her poetry, up until the birth of Ariel, records that "strange limbo of 'gestation / regeneration' which followed her 'death' [her first suicide attempt]". It was a process which Sylvia herself interpreted as her own "drama" of death, gestation and rebirth.

"The Shaman", writes Mircea Eliade (whose book on shamanism Ted reviewed in 1964), is "above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself", and the initiation, "the traditional schema [of which] is suffering, death and resurrection", is 'equivalent to a cure'². In 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals', Ted makes it clear that Sylvia's poetry up until the birth of "the poetic spirit Ariel" was this initiation: that it was "the biology of Ariel, the ontology of Ariel" (WP 178), "a process of self-salvation" and "a resurrection of [Sylvia's] deepest spiritual vitality" (WP 182).

Often too, according to Mircea Eliade, it is an inner crisis (usually around the onset of maturity) which reveals a potential shaman: "... the religious man", Eliade writes, 'is projected into a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, hostility of the surrounding world'. Sylvia, in her journal entries for July 6, 14 and 19, 1953, in *The Bell Jar* and in her story 'Tongues of Stone' (JPBD 267-74), describes her own crisis at the age of 20 in just such terms: she writes of her acute horror at the electrocution of the Rosenbergs, her increasing alienation from and isolation from the surrounding world, and of her own knowledge that something was wrong with her. It was this distress, isolation and knowledge which led her to attempt suicide in 1953. And it was this unsuccessful suicide attempt which she later regarded as the 'death' which would bring about the birth of her new creative self.

'The Tender Place', however, begins not with Sylvia's suicide attempt, but with the electric shock treatment which followed it. It is a terrible and frightening version of events which Sylvia herself described in *The Bell Jar* (p. 117 – 174), in 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams' (JPBD 33) and in her poems 'The Hanging Man' (SPCP 141-2) and 'Poem for a Birthday' (SPCP 136-7). Every one of these descriptions finds echoes in the act of self-wounding and subsequent dismemberment which begins shamanic initiation. And often the spirit which calls the shaman to his or her vocation is, according to Eliade, an ancestor "who takes possession of the initiate"³.

In her poem 'Daddy' (SPCP 222-4) Sylvia describes her suicide attempt as an attempt to get back to her father. And in her story, 'Among the Bubble-bees' (JPBD 259-66), she draws a thinly disguised autobiographical picture of Otto as a powerful god-like father with whom the child protagonist (clearly Sylvia) learns to laugh at thunder and lightning, singing: "Thor is angry. Thor is angry. Boom, boom, boom! Boom, boom, boom!". It is the Father God's "thunderbolt" which crashes into Sylvia's skull in 'The Tender Place' and his "lightnings" which terrify her. And it is Thor's Oak tree⁴ from which she is shorn as an oak limb – like "your Daddy's leg". All these images find parallels in shamanic lore where, in the initiatory ordeal which follows the shamanic 'death', the shaman is dismembered, reduced by demons to "bone seed", then re-born from the re-animated bones. Thor - the Father God – regularly used his magic hammer, Mjolnir, to re-animate bones. And Thor's tree, the Oak, which is a sacred and oracular tree in many European and Scandinavian cultures, is like the Cosmic Tree from which the shamanic drum is made⁵. It is the shaman's own songs (or poems), made to the music and rhythm of this drum, which create the ecstasy that allows the shaman to fly to the Otherworld for healing energies.

Sylvia, writing her own imaginative account of her shamanic journey in 'Poem for a Birthday' (SPCP 131-7), makes the electric shock treatment, "volt upon volt", part of the reconstruction of herself, rather than a dismemberment. And her rebirth is complete. Ted, in 'The Tender Place' however, sees the treatment as wholly destructive: "What went up / Vaporized? Where the lightning rods wept copper / And the nerve threw off its skin / Like a new-born child"⁶. Sylvia, in this imagery, is left as a conductor of raw energy, dangerously unprotected and with "scorched-earth scars" which were still apparent years later. In the final lines of Ted's poem, Sylvia's words are unable to face the light and are still mortally wounded. In this poem, Sylvia's initiation, her poetic journey (as Ted sees it in his essay), is just beginning. Yet, in spite of her vulnerability (and she seemed, Ted has said, "almost invalid in her lack of inner protection" (WP 182)), she seemed driven to continue⁷.

Given Ted's views on the poet as shaman and the seriousness with which he and Sylvia undertook their work, it is clear that both were (in Ted's view, at least) shamans: both were hierophants. 'Horoscope' (BL 64), on the Path of the Hierophant in the pattern-forming world of Briah uses this and the dualistic, ambivalent nature of this Cabbalistic path to convey its meaning.

Ted was the expert astrologer, not Sylvia: but Sylvia had resolved to learn. On February 9th, 1958, in a journal entry which is full of the duality of her present, mundane life of teaching and housekeeping in Northampton versus the "litany of dreams, directives and imperatives" through which she wanted to "recreat[e] worlds", she wrote: "I must meantime this June beginning, learn about planets & horoscopes to be in the proper starred house". In October and November, 1959, whilst at Yaddo, she bewailed her lack of inspiration and was still planning to "teach myself the Tarot pack, the stars" (SPJ 13 Oct. 1959). And on November 7th, 1959, she wrote: "Ted is weary of my talk of astrology and tarot and wanting to learn, and then not bothering to work on my own".

Sylvia seemed to take astrology so lightly that once, when Ted suggests an astrological cause for her tightly strung nerves, she treated it as a joke: "Too tired for saving humour..." (SPJ 13 March 1958). Yet, in the poem, Ted suggests that it was instinctive fear which kept Sylvia from a deeper study of astrology: fear of knowing more clearly what her intuition – which Ted, elsewhere, calls her "internal crystal ball" (WP 184) – already told her.

Sylvia's view of the stars ("Your stars", as Ted puts it) was superficial – confined to those visible above her own "prison yard" space on Earth and to the common, limited perception of zodiac signs and witchdoctor mumbo-jumbo about planets and portents⁸. But what is a witchdoctor but a shaman? Whether he or she is a genuine shaman or a charlatan and trickster is all a matter of degree, a word which (with a capital 'D') begins a line at the very heart of 'Horoscope'. It is this matter of degree, of surface knowledge versus deeper wisdom, which recurs throughout the poem.

There is, for example, great ambivalence in Ted's reference to Babylonian power-sprach and the Babylonian book, for although Babylon came to refer in a worldly sense to the place of Jewish captivity and persecution, and to be associated with a fallen city, Rome, the Anti-Christ and the Scarlet Woman, the word 'Babylonian' is also synonymous with 'Chaldaean'. The Chaldaeans were expert astronomers and astrologers, prophets, seers, and alchemists (hierophants, in other words) and the first known written texts concerning the influence of the stars on the Earth are attributed to them and are regarded as the basis of modern astrology. The Chaldaean Oracles, reputed to have been written by the Persian prophet Zoroaster⁹, are fragments of oracular text which have come down to us in Greek translations and which, through Renaissance Neoplatonic philosophy, have become an important part of Western esoteric tradition.

In 'Horoscope', lines 16-21, Ted suggests that Sylvia already had direct knowledge of occult things: that she "only had to look" into the face of metaphors she chose from the things around her to see her Fate. The 'face' of a metaphor, however, suggests a degree of superficiality. And the phrase, "Only you" (in line 10), is equally ambivalent. At a surface level, it seems to imply that Sylvia did indeed have unique occult skills; or 'only' may be taken as a simple, qualifying 'but', which absolves her from the need to undertake painstaking astrological calculations. Ted, however, would have made such calculations and with his greater degree of understanding of horoscopes he would have known, for example, that Sylvia's "ascendant disruptor in Aries" had meanings which were deeper and more serious than "a scarred face".

Sylvia had only to look in any worldly, superficial, astrology book to find that Uranus, the "Great Disruptor" which appears in her astrological chart in the house of Aries¹⁰, would, there, influence "the appearance of the subject [person] as it strikes someone who meets him for the first time"¹¹. And Sylvia did, in fact, have a scarred face as a legacy of her suicide attempt in 1953. Ted, the serious astrologer-hierophant-magician might have seen (and looking back as he wrote this poem certainly would have seen) "under the skin" something to do with Sylvia's personality, her individuality and her

determination, but also (as in the poem) something which combined her clairvoyant intuition with a rebellious impatience of the usual procedures. In retrospect, Ted would have seen the creation of patterns of behaviour within this Cabbalistic World of Briah which drove Sylvia both towards the violent and angry re-creation of self which is heard in the voice of Ariel but also towards self-destruction. So it was not only, as Ted says in the poem, “your father, your mother, or me” who brought Sylvia her Fate but also a deep disturbance within her self.

It should be noted, too, that the degrees of seriousness and the intuitions which this poem describes also involve its reader. If we look only at the face of the poem the deeper level (or degree) of meaning will not be revealed¹².

‘The Pan’ (BL 121) is the poem on the Path of the Hierophant in the World of Yetzirah. Because it is on this particular path, there is immediately the possibility of ambivalence and duality, and there is also another aspect of the Hebrew letter for this path (Vau) which is apparent in the mingling of past and present on this poem. In Biblical Hebrew, Vau has the function of inverting the apparent tense of the verb: from past to future or from future to past. Also, as a bridge, a channel for Divine energy, it is able “to draw from the future into the past”¹³.

Yet, the reality of the scene with which this poem begins is mundane and exact in its detail. It is a cluttered, worldly scene, late in an Autumn day, with the “brassy, low, wet Westcountry sun” just visible at the far end of a long street in a strange town at the start of a “strange new life”. Given that Ted’s and Sylvia’s marriage was already seriously troubled at that time, this weak, distant sun seems as metaphorical as it was real. Yet this must have been just what it was like on that September day in 1961 when Ted and Sylvia, tired after their long drive from London, arrived in North Tawton with a car full of odds and ends, and a small baby to provide for. So, at first reading, the pan which Ted stopped to buy “to heat milk and baby food” certainly seems to be the pan referred to in the title.

Maenad picture

‘Pan’, however, was a word which had special meaning for Ted and Sylvia in another context, for Pan was the name of the Ouija spirit they had summoned more than once and who had inspired some of their poetry. Pan was the magician - trickster, a soothsaying son of Hermes, but also one of the Pans and Maenads which followed Dionysus / Bacchus – a composite god, derived from many cultures but always a son of the sky god and associated especially with the Orphic Mysteries of shamanic death and rebirth.

Here, in this poem, the young man on the pavement, his arm around a young woman with leopard-claw earrings, is both Ted transposed from a future time with his arm around Assia Wevill¹⁴, and a Dionysic figure, full of life, whose companion wears the “next-to-nothing” dress and the leopard symbol of a Maenad. Had Sylvia or Ted been clairvoyant at this moment, they would have seen their future. But the Divine energies, here, were weak and distant, their own journey had become material and mechanical

(the Morris Traveller a suitable vehicle for this) and they, blindly happy in the car, were unaware of what lay ahead.

'Blood and Innocence' (BL 168), in the lowest World of Assiah, offers a grim picture of the sacrificial and demonic aspects of the Hierophant's path, and of the nine-years of torment Sylvia went through (1953-1962) after her first 'death' until the Ariel spirit was born. Once again, this is a description of Sylvia's shamanic initiation, but this far from the Divine Source she is dangerously exposed to the demons of the Underworld.

The combination of childishness and maturity in the phrase Ted chooses to describe the appearance of the Ariel spirit – "the nine-year-old howl / Come of age" – is important to this poem and it repeats the dichotomies of "Blood and Innocence" and "locusts and honey" with which the poem begins. Blood is a symbol of sacrifice and fertility but it is also an important symbol of initiation (associated both with priesthood and virginity) and birth. It suggests knowledge, both sexual and divine: the opposite of innocence. Locusts and honey, too, represent a dichotomy but here it is two ends of a pathway which are suggested. Both have Biblical associations: locusts with Apollon and one of the woes released from his bottomless pit in The Revelation of Saint John (Rev. 9: 1-12); and honey with enlightenment (I Sam. 14, 24ff.). Both are also associated with Melissa/Hecate/Artemis, the Minoan bee goddess (also a Moon goddess and Great Goddess of Regeneration) and represent the different aspects of her nature: the locusts represent the demons of the Dark of the Moon; the honey, her rewards of rebirth, prophetic utterance and poetry¹⁵.

Locusts and honey, of course, are generally remembered as being the food of John the Baptist in the wilderness. John – "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Matt. 3) - was a prophet, a bridge between God and the people, a hierophant. But it is significant that in 'Blood and Innocence' Sylvia's torment comes between the locusts and the honey. The poem begins with this statement, goes on to describe her nine-year torment, and ends with the words "Mummy Mummy", which encompass both a childish cry for mother and the bandage-wrapped body (embalmed in honey) which was the Egyptian and the Orphic vessel for rebirth¹⁶.

King dies picture

From the start of the poem Sylvia is associated with the torment and the sacrifice of self required of saints and hierophants: with John the Baptist and with St Anthony of Padua, tormented by devils before becoming a charismatic preacher – a channel for God's word. "Only the devil can eat the devil out", Sylvia wrote in 'Witchburning' (SPCP 135-6), and she may well have been familiar with the fourteenth-century picture by the Limbourg brothers of 'Saint Anthony attacked by Devils'¹⁷. It shows Saint Anthony in a coffin being attacked by a black, winged devil, a lion and a large lizard – all Biblical demons. Ted would certainly have recognised that the picture also closely resembles a common alchemical image of death and rebirth in which the confined king/father/body is being destroyed in order to release the son/soul. Sylvia's attack by devils in 'Blood and Innocence', however, does not release her soul: it shatters it.

After her shock treatment 'death', Sylvia's rebirth was self-made. She was reborn, as in the poem, "Not of mother's blood nor of Christ's" but through her own determination and effort. A Frankenstein monster, a mask, a "semblable", fabricated like her own creature in 'The Applicant' (SPCP 221-2) and "matricidal"¹⁸ she may have been, but self was still very much present. So, the devils returned and "the doll" was sacrificed.

Again, Sylvia willingly subjected herself to the torments. Ted writes, in 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals' (WP 182), of "her unique blend of courage and vulnerability" and of the way she faced "what was wrong with herself", "dragged it out into examination" and remade it. This rebirth was pinpointed by Ted as the first emergence of the Ariel spirit in Sylvia's poem 'Stones' (SPCP 136-7), but her rebirth there was into an "after hell", "a quarry of silences" where she sucked "at the paps of darkness". This was a rebirth in the wrong dimension, a rebirth into the darkness of the Underworld where, prompted again by demons, she unearthed her dead father and was possessed by the dark energies of Thor. Her Ariel poetry drums with what in 'Blood and Innocence' is called Thor's "hoof-like thunder", suggesting the cloven-hoofed, Devilish aspect of this nature. His "hammer-dance" anger and his "gutturals" are there in her poetry, too, especially in 'Daddy' (SPCP 222-4) and 'Lady Lazarus' (SPCP 244-7). And Sylvia's own howl and her own avengement for the "twenty-year forsaken / Sobs of Germania-" fill poems like 'Mary's Song' (SPCP 257) and 'Getting There' (SPCP 247-9).

In 'Blood and Innocence', the demons take all this and still there is no salvation, no enlightenment: only the "gilded theatre" of the world; the emptiness which Sylvia expresses in many of her last poems; and a 'self' like the fragile, "soul-animal" she so beautifully describes in 'Balloons' (SPCP 271-2).

Nameless faces, Mummy, Daddy- these are all that is left for Sylvia in the emptiness at the end of the poem. But the repeated "Mummy", "Daddy", in the last lines seem to echo the cries of her and Ted's children. Their children are the potential healing, the sugar – "its crystals a little poultice" – which she wrote of in one of her last poems, 'Kindness' (SPCP 269-70). And these children, perhaps, are the honey which Ted wraps into Mummy bandages at the end of this poem and which, in their innocence and in the blood-line which they inherit, offer a different sort of rebirth.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Hughes, T. 'Regeneration', *The Listener*, 29 October 1964
2. Eliade, M. *Shamanism*, Princeton University Press, 1972. p. 27.
3. Eliade, M. *Op.cit.* pp. 22, 82.
4. The oak was sacred to many sky gods and their daughters and sons, including Zeus and Athena, Jupiter and Minerva, Helios and Circe, Dionysus, Herne (who was the British Hermes/Pan), and the Celtic Dagda and Brigid/Brigantia (who was also the goddess of poetic inspiration). The oak was also commonly regarded as a magical

doorway to the mystic realms (Paterson, Tree Wisdom, Thorsons, London, 1996. pp. 176-82).

5. Samoyed shamans are carried by spirit guides to an island on which grows "The Tree of the Lord of the Earth". The Lord calls to the shaman: "My branch has just fallen; take it and make a drum of it that will serve you all your life" (Eliade, M. Op.cit. p. 40).

6. A creature newborn from a sloughed skin is a common shamanic image, based on magical beliefs associated with metamorphosis.

7. In 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals', Ted describes the process as having a "weird autonomy", as if her poetry was "a secret crucible, or rather a womb, an almost biological process – and just as much beyond her manipulative interference. And like a pregnancy selfish with her resources" (WP 180-1).

8. Colin Low comments that Chokmah (Sephira 2) "is the sphere of the Mazlot, the Zodiac, and in the cosmology of the ancients, the containing power of the stars" (e-mail to AS, 12 Oct. 20001). This offers another, Cabbalistic, interpretation of "Your stars – the guards / Of your prison yard, their zodiac."

9. Joseph Cambell, in *The Masks of God* (Penguin, 1979. p 7) notes that Zoroaster was a prophet of mystical rebirth and regeneration whose dates "have been variously placed between c. 1200 and c. 550 B.C."

10. Neil Spencer, broadcaster, journalist and author of *True as the Stars Above* (Gollancz, London, 2000) has provided me with the astrological information on which this discussion is based. Sylvia Plath's horoscope, drawn by John Etherington, appears in *Apollon: The Journal of Psychological Astrology*, Issue 2, April 1999. (p. 64) but Olwyn Hughes, who is a very competent astrologer, says that both Ted's and Sylvia's charts in this article are based on incorrect birth times (Letter to AS, 27 April 2000). Etherington based his chart for Sylvia on information given by editor Karen Kuckil in *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* (p. 3). Sylvia's mother, however, in the introduction to *Letters Home* wrote that Otto, "at a luncheon that day", told colleagues that he hoped his next child would be a son. This throws some doubt on the birth time of 14.10, unless Otto and his colleagues were having a late lunch. Regardless, of this, at any time between 00.00 and 14.10 on 27 October, 1932, Uranus would have been in the house of Aries in Sylvia's chart.

11. From a lavishly illustrated, short, coffee-table style book by David Christie-Murray entitled *The Practical Astrologer: All you need to know to construct birth charts, cast horoscopes and discover what the stars have to reveal* (Australian Book Centre, Queensland, 1998. p. 100).

12. The word 'hierophant' is, itself, from a Greek word meaning 'revelation'.

13. In a discussion of the Torah and the mystical significance of the Hebrew letters, the

power of Vau to draw the future into the past is associated with the power of “Teshuvah (‘repentance’ and ‘returning to G-d’) from love” to mitigate one’s past transgressions (VAU).

14. In ‘Folktale’ (THSP 309), Ted associates Assia with the leopard of Ein Gedi. The leopard (or panther) is a symbol of Dionysus, and Ein Gedi has Biblical and Cabbalistic associations with dionysic passion. In legend it was the oasis where King David hid in a cave with Bat-Sheba, and in the Songs of Solomon the beloved “... is unto me as a cluster of camphire / In the vineyards of En-gedi” (1, 14).

15. Taurus is the astrological sign for this path and the Minoan Dionysus, ‘The Bull God’, is associated with Melissa and with spiritual rebirth. Porphyry wrote: “the moon... they called Melissa [‘bee’], because... bees are begotten of bulls. And souls that pass to earth are bull-begotten”. Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, Viking, 1999. pp. 117-9).

16. Like the “Mummy-cloths” of Sylvia’s poem, ‘Facelift’ (SPCP 155-6) from which a new being would emerge. Ted notes say that this poem describes “the experience of an acquaintance, requisitioned for the poet’s myth of self-renewal” (SPCP 219).

17. Held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. There is another version by Grunwald in the Museum Unterlinden, Berlin, which really does show St Anthony on a bad day. It was used in *Man and His Symbols* (Ed. Jung, Aldus, 1964. p.48) to illustrate an article by Jung on dreams and the subconscious.

18. She describes her matricidal feelings in her journals (SPJ 12 Dec. 1985) and, very much as Ted describes them in the poem, in her story ‘Tongues of Stone’ (JPBD p.271) and *The Bell Jar* (p. 101).

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Valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional
Lovers card
Zain path
The Path of The Lovers – Zain

Tarot card 6. Tree path 7.

Joining Sephiroth 6 (Tiphereth) and 3 (Binah).

'St Botolph's', 'Flounders', 'The Error', 'Costly Speech'.

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The Path of the Lovers links Tiphereth (Sephira 6), at the heart of the Tree, with Binah (Sephira 3), the seat of the Great Goddess on the Pillar of Form. It is the path on which, symbolically, female and male are brought together in order to create a whole being capable of new, superconscious awareness and able to achieve new spiritual growth. The number of this path is 7, the number of completion in the material world, as it is in the Biblical story of the Creation.

The Tarot number for this path is 6, which is also the number of Tiphereth (The Way, Beauty). This suggests that what is to be learned by those travelling on this path will be an important indication of The Way, which is the one path to spiritual rebirth. And, since 6 is also 2×3 , the female energies of Binah (Truth, Understanding) on this path are doubly important and all the various powers of the Goddess which were discussed earlier in 'The Path of the Empress' are doubly active.

On this Path of the Lovers, journeyers encounter the Divine female energies (those of the Great Goddess of Orphic myth or, in Hebrew Cabbalistic texts¹, of the 'Shabbat Queen' or 'Sabbath Bride'), and the power of these to give and to inspire love may enrapture and elevate them to new awareness of their own mystical potential. Appropriately, the Hebrew letter for this path, Zain (meaning 'sword' or 'weapon') portrays, by its shape, the upward flow of energies - "the return" to the Divine – then the broadening to right and left which encompasses the Divine energies of awe and love. It portrays, too, the double edged potential of the energies on this path, for the sword is a symbol of supreme power and of the binding loyalty which unites its bearer with such power but it is also a weapon of justice, punishment, anger and division.

The astrological sign for this path, Gemini (ruled by Mercury), also represents the binding power of Divine love and the uniting of Divine and human energies. In Greek myth, Castor and Polydeuces were twins whose great love for each other persuaded the Father God, Zeus, to allow them to remain always together as the constellation of Gemini. They also combined Divine and human energies, being the grandsons of Zeus and the sons of Leda, Zeus and the human King, Tyndareus².

All these aspects of this Path of The Lovers are part of the archetypal Greek myth, 'The Judgement of Paris', which is depicted on The Lovers card in traditional Tarot packs.

Generally, the traditional cards show four figures: a man embraced by two women, and a winged cherub, with a bow and arrow, hovering above them. The man represents Paris, son of the King of Troy who, because his mother dreamed he would bring ruin to the nation, was abandoned, suckled by a wild boar, and grew up amongst shepherds. The two female figures on the card are two forms of the Great Goddess: Aphrodite / Venus (the amorous Goddess who rose from the sea's foam and whose magic girdle could make anyone, god or human, fall in love with its wearer), and either Hera (Mother

Goddess) or Artemis (Goddess of the Hunt and protectress of children) or a composite of both. The hovering cherub is Eros, Aphrodite's son by Hermes³, who, inheriting some of his parents' skills, is able to inspire love between whoever he chooses but is also mischievous and irresponsible.

Classical Greek myth tells how all the gods and goddesses, except Eris (Goddess of Discord), were invited to the wedding of the nereid, Thetis, to the mortal, Peleus. Angry at her exclusion, Eris threw amongst the guests a golden apple inscribed "for the fairest". Hera, Aphrodite and Artemis each claimed the apple should be hers. They appealed to Zeus for judgement and he, not willing to make the choice, decided that a mortal should settle the matter. Paris was that mortal, and seduced by Aphrodite, who unfairly used the power of her magic girdle and promised him the love of the most beautiful of women, Helen of Troy, Paris chose her and offended Hera and Artemis. In the terrible wars which ensued when Paris abducted Helen from her husband, Menelaus, the slighted Goddesses were avenged.

Paris picture

Both Robert Graves and Joseph Campbell question this telling of the story⁴. In their interpretations, The Judgement of Paris is not a judgement of the Goddesses, who together represent all female energies and are thus three aspects of the Great Goddess, but of Paris, a mortal who is led to the Goddesses by Hermes, the Guide of the Soul, and who needed to accept the great Goddess in all her forms if he was to obtain the golden apple of immortality and spiritual rebirth. By succumbing to sexual enthrallment and being swayed in his judgement by only one aspect of the Female, Paris fails.

Ted, who wrote of the Great Goddess at length in *Shakespeare and The Goddess of Complete Being*, would have agreed with Graves and Campbell. He, too, discussed Paris's relationship with the Great Goddess and (like Graves) identified Helen of Troy with her (SBCB 182-5). But in 'St. Botolph's', the poem on The Lovers path in the Atziluthic World of Archetypes, Ted's use of the myth is closer to the Classical Greek version. Nevertheless, since Ted regarded Greek myth as "a working anatomy of our psychic life... a whole system of keys and passwords and introductions to energies, and relationships between energies, within ourselves"⁵, his use of the myth must be regarded as having personal and psychological significance in the Cabbalistic journey he and Sylvia are making in Birthday Letters.

In 'St. Botolph's', Sylvia has all the attributes of the love goddess, Aphrodite / Venus. The waves which surround her may be sound-waves, but her striking looks, the easy sway of her emotions, her vivacity, her intentions ("You meant to knock me out", Ted writes), all are like those of Aphrodite when she seduced Paris. Even Sylvia's headscarf, which Ted later found in his pocket, seems like a worldly manifestation of Aphrodite's magic band which had power over gods and men: "The world lies in its weaving", Aphrodite told Hera, who once borrowed it in order to seduce Zeus and keep him from his wars, "You won't return, I know, your mission unfulfilled". It is significant that Ted makes this headscarf blue in the poem, not red, as Sylvia twice notes in her

journal entry for that night (26 Feb. 1958)⁶ and which would have matched the red shoes Lucas Myers remembers⁷ her wearing. Blue is the colour of Aphrodite, who is Sea Goddess and Moon Goddess as well as Love Goddess: blue is the colour of the band which Botticelli's Venus wears in her hair as she rises from the waves.

The colour of Sylvia's headscarf is not the only discrepancy between Ted's poetic account of their meeting and Lucas Myers' memory of the events leading up to it, which he recorded in his book *Crow Steered, Bergs Appeared* (pp. 29-33) and in Appendix I of Anne Stevenson's *Bitter Fame* (Viking, 1989. p. 312). Myers, in 'St. Botolph's', is once again a Hermes / Mercury guide leading Ted to Sylvia as he did in the earlier poem 'Visit' (BL 7). "Lucas", Ted says, "engineered" the meeting: but, as Myers remarks in his own account, it was "Very curious engineering". He describes how Sylvia approached him, danced with him reciting his poetry, and asked him where Ted Hughes was. "I pointed towards the end of the hall", he writes, "and she went off. I accomplished this sudden engineering without intending to because I disapproved of Sylvia and didn't like seeming to put her off Ted". He did not see the actual meeting, only, next day, the bite marks – the "ring-moat of tooth marks", as Ted calls it, choosing an image which is suitably watery for a Sea Goddess's brand.

In the poem, too, unlike the image on the Tarot cards, it is Ted's girl-friend, tense as "a loaded cross-bow" before Ted meets Sylvia and "hissing rage in the doorway" afterwards, who is given the attributes of the slighted Goddess Artemis, Goddess of the Hunt. In reality, Lucas Myers tells us, this girl-friend was "a sensitive, handsome, light-brown-haired and deep-eyed woman, quite English, quite reserved and the polar opposite of Sylvia" (CSBA 30). Before he met Sylvia, Ted wrote of this other young woman in 'Fallgrief's Girlfriends' (NSP 9) as "a woman of such wit and looks / He can brag of her in any company". Truly, it would seem, she was a rival Goddess equally worthy of Ted / Paris's love: and it is as a rival that she appears in Sylvia's semi-fictionalized account of the party in 'stone Boy With Dolphin' (JPBD 297-32).

There are yet more 'mistakes' in this poem. Writer / Astrologer, Neil Spencer, points out that the astrological information with which Ted begins the poem is not correct for the night of 25 February 19568. He describes two errors which would be immediately obvious to anyone familiar enough with astrological charts to construct one for that night.

To those (like me) who know nothing about serious astrology, the start of this poem is meaningless jargon and not good poetry. But Ted, at the time of writing this poem, was a very experienced astrologer: he would not have made the simple errors which Spencer discerns. Nor, if he was (as I believe) creating the poem as part of his Cabbalistic journey, would he have been careless. The errors, therefore, were deliberate: and I believe that there were two very good reasons for this.

Firstly, Ted's presentation of the astrological data in 'St Boltolph's' is glib and confident and effectively demonstrates his own carelessness and arrogance with regard to astrological calculations and portents. He was, he says, only a "wait-and-see

astrologer”: one who brushed off bad portents with a casual “so what?”, and one who consulted “Prospero’s book” for meaning – a failing he accuses Sylvia of in ‘Horoscope’ (BL 64). He tells us, too, that an expert poet-astronomer like “Our Chaucer” would, unlike him, have heeded the portents, “stayed at home” and made his own calculations, and, “Locating the planets more precisely, / He would have pondered it deeper”. Ted, it is apparent, was still a novice in the magical arts and a Fool at this early stage of his Cabbalistic journey.

Secondly, I believe Ted’s purpose in making these deliberate mistakes was magical.

According to Neil Spencer, the two errors in the astrological details Ted gives in ‘St. Botolph’s’ are as follows:

the night’s Moon / Jupiter conjunction (in Leo) did not oppose Venus (in Aries) but the Sun. Nor is it possible for Venus (in Aries) to be ‘pinned’ to Hughes’s Midheaven if the Sun (in Pisces) is in his tenth house.

But there, in the poem, are Jupiter and the Moon linked to Ted’s natal Sun sign, Leo, bringing “Disastrous expense... Especially for me”, as he says. And there, too, is Venus “pinned exact” on his Midheaven. Thus Ted invokes the powers of Jupiter and Venus at the beginning of this poem in which he sets out to re-create his first meeting with Sylvia. And “suddenly”, in the tipsy, Bacchanalian scene he creates, there is Sylvia, seen in a flash – iconically “unalterable, stilled in the camera’s glare” and “clearer, more real / Than in any of the years in its shadow”⁹.

My reasons for interpreting Ted’s intentions as magical in this way, stem from his twice repeated use of the phrase “Our Chaucer”, which is redolent with echoes of Renaissance Magus, Marsilio Ficino. Ficino referred often to his revered teacher, Plato, as “Our Plato”¹⁰. He also wrote at length about the nature and purpose of divino furore, or divine frenzy, and the way in which music and poetry may express this and imitate the harmony of the Heavens. Through furor, poetry (in particular) can release the Soul buried in matter within each of us so that it may return to the Divine. “[P]oetry springs from divine frenzy, frenzy from the Muses, and the Muses from Jove [Jupiter]”, Ficino writes in a long letter to Peregrino Agli¹¹. He goes on to identify four kinds of Divine frenzy “love, poetry, the mysteries and prophecy” and to note that “According to Plato, Socrates attributes the first kind of frenzy to Venus, the second to the Muses...”.

It is not surprising then that Ted, who was familiar with the work of Ficino and with the concept of furor, should invoke the powers of Jupiter (and his Muses) and of Venus in ‘St. Botolph’s’, thus appropriately uniting the divine frenzies of poetry and love. This, after all, is the path of The Lovers, on which Male and Female energies are united and the Divine spark of love is lit. It is also the path of Zain (the Hebrew letter which, as noted earlier, symbolizes the return to the Divine) and the first path to bring Ted and Sylvia together on their Cabbalistic journey in Birthday Letters. Nor is it surprising that Ted should note that Chaucer, knowing the correct astrological details for that night (as Ted certainly did when he wrote this poem) would have conclude that “the solar system married us / Whether we knew it or not”¹².

In the pattern forming World of Briah, the poem 'Flounders' (BL 65) offers a metaphor for the possibilities life could have offered Ted and Sylvia. In July 1957, they were, so-to-speak, beached and floundering¹³: they were newly married, had just arrived in America and were spending a few weeks relaxing in a beachfront cottage at Eastham, Cape Cod, before their teaching jobs began¹⁴. Their long-term plans for the future were still uncertain but their commitment to poetry was mutual and of utmost importance.

It was at this time, as Anne Stevenson relates in *Bitter Fame* (p. 111), that the incident occurred which Ted describes in 'Flounders'. Ted and Sylvia had set off from Chatham (in an inlet off Nantucket Sound, South of Eastham) in a hired rowing boat. After a few hours of fishing, the tide and the wind changed and they were "dragged seaward" by the strong current. Manoeuvring and luck beached them on a sand-bar, and there they stayed until the skipper of a passing power-boat saw them and towed them to safety.

Again, on this Path of the Lovers, different forms of the Great Goddess appear in the poem and a choice is made. Aphrodite / Venus ("the goddess, the beauty / Who was poetry's sister") is clearly there throughout. Sometimes fish-tailed¹⁵, always fickle, she plays with Ted and Sylvia who (foolishly perhaps) have committed themselves to a row-boat in her watery world. Ted describes their confident naivety: "our map / Somebody's optimistic assurance".

Artemis is there, too. For it is she, sister of Aphrodite, who was Goddess of Poetry before Apollo her twin brother took this role from her.

As a fishing expedition, the day had both good and bad results: as an adventure it was exciting but perilous. Both aspects are apparent in the vivid moods and descriptions of the poem but the question with which Ted begins, "Was that a happy day?", asks for an objective judgement of the events rather than an emotional response to them. And Ted's own comment, set in the seven isolated lines which follow this description, puts this so "tiny an adventure" into the context of their marriage and makes it of "monumental" importance in that context.

What does this mean? In what way were these events so monumental in their marriage? Ted's careful choice of the word 'monumental' gives the events of that day iconic significance in the life which he and Sylvia shared and in which marriage meant not only a legal contract, a shared love and linked lives, but also a united dedication to poetry. Appropriately, on this path which in Cabbalistic numerology is Number 7 (completion in the physical world) Ted states their total commitment to this shared purpose: "we / Only did what poetry told us to do".

Yet, at the time of their arrival in America, there were still judgements and choices to be made – a path to be chosen – and Ted identifies three aspects of the adventure which suggest three elements of Aphrodite's warning to them about the path they seemed to have chosen.

Firstly, there was the easy option suggested in the “slight ordeal” which Ted and Sylvia had undergone. They had launched themselves into the Goddesses world, relied naively on the advice of others, stayed in “mid-channel” and gone with the flowing tide. Sea Robin picture They had seen others cruise past them but had been “happy enough”, bobbing along with their lead weighted lines bouncing along the bottom and a small, poor catch of “two or three sea-robins”¹⁶ to reward them. In many respects, this was exactly what they had been doing in their lives until that time. They had followed the paths suggested by parents, teachers and society, and had gained academic qualifications. But in terms of their own ambitions, they had, as it were, rowed their own boat (pulled “Northward”, perhaps towards the North Star, the World-axis of spirit and destiny); lived meagrely; and written, their work being published only occasionally¹⁷. They had been happy enough, and now marriage and changing fortune had brought them to a beach in America.

In real life, as in the poem, “big, good America” would rescue Sylvia and Ted and offer them a taste of financial security and the comfortable affluence which a secure job could bring¹⁸. This was the second aspect of the experience Aphrodite offered them that day: a “small thrill-breath of what many live by”; the “easy plenty” suggested by the beach-houses and gardens of the safe “back-channels” where they caught a boat-load of big, tasty flounders.

The third aspect of this adventure, “a small prize, a toy miniature of a life”, is linked symbolically in the poem with the horse-shoe crab’s carapace which Ted found when they were stranded on the sand-bar. Crab picture The adventure itself, being a result of fickle winds and tides, falls clearly within Aphrodite’s powers. The visions she shows Sylvia and Ted are fishy and watery, full of “marsh-grass / Wild original greenery”, “mud-slicks”, and “fiddler-crab warrens”. And the tiny “perfect” horse-shoe crab carapace (honey coloured and bee size and moon-shaped, as suits a symbol of a Bee Goddess and a Moon Goddess) is also a natural miniature of “a life”. The horse-shoe crab, in fact, is an ancient species which occupies an important niche in marine ecology and supports a world of smaller creatures on and in its shell as if they were all bonded into “a single animal”¹⁹.

All these aspects of this tiny adventure are encompassed by the pronoun, “It”, with which Ted begins the final six lines of the poem. So, this “toy miniature of a life”, this “small prize” which became so monumental in their marriage is seen by Ted as a warning which Aphrodite gave to him and Sylvia but which they did not hear. So, they chose Artemis, and this jealous goddess did not tell them of her sister’s warning.

But was it a happy day? Would Ted and Sylvia have been happier if they had not chosen to do only what poetry told them to do and had not given up their safe jobs and the promise of future comfort to follow that path? There are things in the poem which suggest this may not have been so. The deceptive calm of the inshore waters; the excessiveness of the “surplus” of huge flounders which were caught; the romantic golden glow of the luxurious “play-world” in the summary Ted gives at the end of his description of that day: all hint at the wiles of a fickle goddess anxious to woo the lovers

from her sister. And, it must be remembered that what is to be learned on this path is that in order to gain the wholeness of a single animal – of a “single soul” – all aspects of the Great Goddess must be embraced. Sylvia and Ted embraced only one, but to have chosen only the other would, equally, have aroused a jealous goddess’s wrath.

Error and discord in Cabbala are the subject of complex debate. At its simplest, discord is seen as the result of negative energies associated with each Sephira, or as the mask or the empty shell of the positive energies. At its most complex, discord is Evil, ever present in the separate world of demons in the dark Abyss. For all Cabbalists these negative energies (known as Qlipoth or shells) are part of Creation and in some Cabbalistic texts they are seen as the result of an error made during the Creation.

Z’ev ben Shimon Halevi (Adam and the Kabbalistic Tree, Rider, 1978. p. 237) explains disharmony and discord as the shadow side of human nature, and believes that our mistakes and the discord which results from them are a necessary part of spiritual testing in any struggle towards harmony and good. “Nothing is separate in Creation,” he writes, “nothing can operate on its own, because all is One”.

The poem on the Path of The Lovers in The World of Yetzirah is ‘Error’ (BL 122). It expresses not just the sadness of discord and disorder but the mistake of trying to continue the Cabbalistic journey once the “wrong fork” in the path has been taken. The Qlipoth for the Sephiroth joined by this path of Zain (Sephira 6 and Sephira 3) are hollowness and fatalism. And the world which Ted sees as he writes ‘Error’ is a hollow world, a world “in a bubble”, or a thin “transparency” in which the “wedding picture” of his and Sylvia’s new start in Devon looks like a picture on a foreign grave. Nevertheless, beneath the unreality of this scene, “the real bones” – his and Sylvia’s – underwent everything associated with that move, and this path which they “had chosen finally” was, in fact, “aimed at a graveyard”. So, Fate too, is part of the poem.

The doubleness of dream and reality, the hollow and the actual, pervades this poem. Similarly, the phrases for meditation on this path of Zain are double edged: “Twins reconciled” and “The answer of the Oracles is always Death”. Ted and Sylvia were individuals joined by love, like the twins of Gemini, but the discord between them was not reconciled by their move to Devon. And the Goddess who presides over ‘Error’ is not Aphrodite / Venus, who presided over ‘Flounders’, but the jealous Artemis. This chaste Goddess with her hunting weapons is seen more aptly, here, as Nemesis²⁰, carrier of the cut apple bough and the wheel of Fate. In her sodden, gloomy orchard, Ted and Sylvia struggle in the mesh of roots of her stinging nettles. And instead of the Golden Apples of Immortality which they might have gained had Ted chosen their path more wisely, it was Nemesis’s Apple of Discord which grew there.

Devon was, as Ted says in the poem, his “land of totems” but, as always, the images and descriptions in this poem are as real as they are metaphorical. Devon, which produces some of the best cider in England, is often called “the orchard in the West”. But Ted knew, too, that at the Western limits of the Ancient Greeks’ world lay the land of Elysium, abode of the gods and the place in which the Great Goddess’s Golden Apples

of Immortality grew. Both he and Sylvia also knew that Devon and Cornwall (still known in England as the Westcountry, as if it is a separate place) were ancient Celtic kingdoms, home of the earliest Britons, steeped in Celtic myth and legend and associated, especially, with romantic lovers. Lancelot and Guinivere, Tristan (Prince of Lyonesse) and Isolt: all played out part of their stories here. All lived, and still live (as Ted and Sylvia do in this poem) in a land which is both real and unreal – a mythical dreamland, the “Never-never land” of story, but identified with Devon and Cornwall.

Both Ted and Sylvia (in her poem ‘Lyonesse’ (SPCP 232-3)) identify the Devon area to which they moved in September 1961 with Lyonesse, the sunken Celtic Kindom which, as legend tells, now lies beneath the sea off the coast of Cornwall. In Sylvia’s poem, Lyonesse is a lost dream: a sunken Heaven in which people continue to live as they always lived, with “the same faces / The same places”, but forgotten by God. Perhaps Devon did seem like this to her, and certainly she and Ted dreamed of a new start when they made their move. But, as in her poem, their dream did not turn out as expected.

In ‘Error’, too, Sylvia and Ted live like dreamers. Remembering it, Ted sees the move as his choice, and a mistake. Sylvia “sleepwalked” with him, “gallant and desperate and hopeful”, whilst he “wrestled” with the responsibilities and the material necessities of the move, dealing with “the blankets, the caul and the cord” of a new beginning, just as he actually did when Nicholas was born in January 1962. But already it was too late.

Already they had lost the Italian sun. They had given up their planned trip to Italy, which was part of the requirements of the Somerset Maugham Award which Ted had won in March 1960²¹; they had lost the bright sun of their early love which was like the Italian Renaissance sun which shines so brightly on the traditional Tarot card of The Lovers; and, having taken this “wrong fork” to a “dead-end” in a “red-soil tunnel”, they had lost the sun of Wisdom which lights the Cabbalistic path.

And already, Sylvia was in “The labyrinth”: the phrase is set importantly on its own in lines where Ted imagines Sylvia’s own, Devonian Lyonesse, with its “brambly burrow lanes”, “stump-wart” women, huddled cattle and hills, and a “dark-age dialect”²². This was where “The world” ended: again the phrase is isolated, and the capital on ‘The’ gives it emphasis. But which world? Probably the same three worlds which were linked to the lost Italian sun: the real world of their marriage, the dream world of its Devon renaissance and their shared, Cabbalistic, healing world of poetry.

The “dead-end, crushing halt”, which Ted describes earlier in ‘Error’, echoes the title of a poem which Sylvia wrote shortly before ‘Lyonesse’. ‘Stopped Dead’ (SPCP 230) is a poem full of anger and bitterness, possibly linked to an incident in which Sylvia ran her car off the road in what she later suggested was a suicide attempt²³. Was she testing “the limits”, perhaps, like the bellow in the oak woods in ‘Error’, which suggests that the bull-god / Thor / Otto was still around. Certainly she was testing the limits in her poetry and the anger she had learned to express in her search for Otto was in many of her poems at that time.

In Devon, Sylvia was no longer an American goddess: a goddess of the New World²⁴. She had stripped off that royal “garment” and was “soul-naked” and at her most vulnerable. Her journal notes for those months in Devon show just how hard she tried to be part of the local community, but they show, also, the cold scrutiny with which she observed her neighbours and an acid, biting sarcasm, especially in her jealous comments about Nicola Tyrer.

Ted’s poem, too, continues to be ambivalent. He connects the testing bellow in the oak-woods with “the boots” and the “throbbing gutter”, which are real enough images of a rain-soaked Devon world but which also find echoes in Sylvia’s poems: ‘Daddy’ (SPCP 222-4), and ‘Getting There’ (SPCP 247-9), for example. At the same time, he writes that “A thin squandering of blood-water - / searched for the river and the sea”, as if the few poems of natural beauty, such as ‘The Night Dances’ (SPCP 249-50), were a frail lifeline of healing love by which Sylvia tried to return to Aphrodite / Venus’s watery realms.

In the end, however, this was what they both “had chosen finally”. A world of discord – “a desolation” in which jealousy and anger outweighed love. This was error.

In October 1961, Sylvia had signed a contract with Heinemann for the publication of *The Bell Jar* but in November, when she heard that she had been awarded a Saxton Grant for prose writing, she postponed publication for a year so that she could submit the manuscript as work she was doing for this grant²⁵. She was well aware that many people would recognize themselves in her novel and would be upset at her characterization of them; and the portrait of her heroine’s mother was particularly cruel to Aurelia Plath. In letters to her brother and to Aurelia, Sylvia dismissed the book as “a pot-boiler”, adding that it was “a secret” which “no-one must read” (SPLH 16, 25 Oct.; 29 Nov. 1962). Yet, Ted has noted that she wrote the book “at high speed and in great exhilaration” (WP 185); and in August 1961 she sounded jubilant when she recorded her completion of it (SPJ Note 438. p. 696). Her true estimation of the book is, I think, suggested by the pseudonym under which she chose to publish it: Victoria Lucas (‘Victory’ and ‘Light’)²⁶, and by the fact that in 1962 she did offer it to two American publishers, Knopf and Harper & Row, both of whom rejected it.

Sylvia’s decision to publish *The Bell Jar* is the background to ‘Costly Speech’ (BL 170), the poem on the path of Zain in the material World of Assiah.

At the start of the poem is the Moon Goddess in all her forms. As the full moon, she is Binah, Aima, the Great Mother of All, shining between the Manhattan skyscrapers, rather as Lady Liberty’s torch of Enlightenment shines across the waters just off the Manhattan shore. As the new moon, in “her whole family of phases”, she is the lover and the crone. She is Aphrodite, Venus, Persephone – all the goddesses of passionate love, and the Beauty of Tiphereth: and she is Nemesis, Hecate, Kali – all the goddesses associated with death. “Rising and falling”, the Moon is there throughout life and runs like a gleam “on the rails” through all human endeavours. And, just as the energies of

Tiphereth are linked to every path of the Cabbalistic Tree, so the energies of the Moon and the Goddess affect all living things. All Nature responds to her, and Ted invokes her powers to preside over this poem.

Binah (Sephira 3, towards which the journeyer travels on the path of Zain) is associated with boundaries and limits. Sylvia, in 1961 and 1962, was already testing limits in all her writing. But when she chose to publish *The Bell Jar*, she not only overstepped the limits of conventional ideas of love and morality, she also acted like a goddess, creating and destroying, believing that her word (and human laws) could keep her secret and that she could control the chaos she knew the book could seed in the lives of others. This was tempting and challenging Fate.

The 'Spiritual Experience' of Binah, from which the Cabbalist must learn, is the 'Vision of Sorrow' and this was the vision Ted saw and captured in 'Error'. It would be seen again in the results of Sylvia's choice.

The 'Virtue' of Binah is silence, and that is what Sylvia chose to reject. Ariel, as Ted noted "is dramatic speech of a kind" (WP 175), so, too, is *The Bell Jar*: and words are powerful weapons. When Sylvia's words did become public, and especially when *The Bell Jar* was published in America, the results were costly: and not to Sylvia alone.

Tiphereth (Sephira 6 – from which the traveller on Zain journeys towards Binah) also has negative energies. The 'Vice' of Tiphereth is self-importance – focus on self. Sylvia's failing was to let ambition and self-confidence outweigh love and compassion. Everything about love forbids that.

In 'Costly Speech', the things which Ted picks out as enforcing this veto are very personal and some, perhaps, could not be fully understood by anyone but Sylvia and himself. What, for example, are readers to make of the Sylvia's son "doing something strange in a glide of the Deshka", unless they know that Nicholas is a marine biologist who works in Alaska, where he feels comfortably distanced from all the attention focussed on his family? And what did Ted mean by the phrase which is associated with the "adamant" veto of Yosemite: "onto your daughter's page, with signatures"? Perhaps he was thinking of the signatures which were stolen from books which Sylvia had given to him (thefts which again show selfishness outweighing natural compassion) and which he later gave to Frieda and Nicholas. Frieda's poem, 'The Signature', describes these thefts, and she also spoke of them in an interview with Libby Purves in December 1999²⁷. Although the meaning of these phrases may not be clear, it is very clear that every image from line 6 to line 27 is associated with the New World, and each one of these images links Nature with Sylvia and with her family. In these lines, past, present and future; water, earth, fire and air; family and love - everything associated with The Goddess forbids Sylvia's costly speech.

In this lowest World of Assiah, however, where darkness and the demons of the Abyss are very close and very powerful, such simple natural "guards" as love and concern for one's family may not be enough. There is a hint of demonic interference in Ted's

suggests that a “spooky chemistry” was at work in the editors whose opportunism saw the loophole in American copyright laws which precipitated the American publication of *The Bell Jar*. And he is clear that it was Sylvia’s own “dead fingers” which unpicked the legal locks which allowed this to happen.

Yet, this action of Sylvia’s was not necessarily an intervention from beyond the grave. For, although the events which led up to the publication of *The Bell Jar* in America did not begin until after Sylvia’s death, this poem shows her, even as she was alive and writing, as half “mortified”. And, in reality, this seems to have been true. Half of Sylvia did seem to be dead to the pain she might cause others by publishing prose and poems about real events and real people. Yet, half of her was concerned enough to try and keep *The Bell Jar* secret. And whilst half of her, especially as the persona she adopted in some of her poems, smiled with malicious and vindictive glee as she attacked family and friends, half of her smiled with pleasure at the creative achievement of her new voice.

In the end, as in the final line of this poem, it was Sylvia’s choice, and her choice alone, to publish *The Bell Jar*. Her mistakes were to ignore her own human fallibility and to believe she could control the future, and, especially, to allow her shadow self, the cold, heartless, mirror double which she saw so clearly in her poem, ‘Mirror’ (SPCP 173-4), to dominate the warm, loving, natural energies which were also within her. In effect, Sylvia had become the Gemini twins of the Lovers’ Path. Her love was turned inwards and was self-focussed, and even within herself that love was divided and unbalanced. Inevitably, in Cabbala and in life, such lack of wholeness and harmony is costly.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The importance of the ‘Shabbat Queen’ and the symbolic meaning of the shape of the letter ‘Zain’ is discussed in *Zain - The Mystical Significance of Hebrew Letters (ZAIN)*.
2. There is little agreement about the paternity of either Castor or Polydeuces. Some say Zeus fathered both: some that King Tyndareus did. Some say Castor was fathered by Zeus, and Polydeuces by King Tyndareus. Leda, their mother (with whom Zeus mated in the form of a swan) was, however, the daughter of the gods, Zeus and Nemesis. The whole story can be found in Graves, R. *Greek Myths*, Cassell, 1981. pp. 71-3.
3. Alternatively, Eros was fathered by Zeus; or he was the son of Aries (Wind) and Nuit (Night), hatched from a silver egg and hidden in a cave by Nuit who stood guard as a Triple Goddess (Night, Order, Justice) whilst at the entrance to the cave sat Rhea, playing her drum.
4. Graves, R. *The White Goddess*, Faber, 1977. pp. 256-7. Campbell, J. *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*, Penguin, 1980. pp. 158-161.

5. Hughes, T. Book review of *The God Beneath the Sea* by Garfield and Blishen, *Children's Literature in Education*, No.3, 1970. pp. 66-7.
6. This hairband was clearly something Sylvia valued and would not have parted with lightly. In her journal entry she calls it "my lovely red hairband" and "the red bandeau which I loved with all the redness of my heart". In Sylvia's semi-fictional account of the St Botolph's party, 'Stone Boy With Dolphin' (JPBD 297-32), the heroine's stolen hairband is also red.
7. Myers, L. *Crow Steered Bergs Appeared*, Proctor hall Press, Tennessee, 2001. p. 32.
8. Spencer, N. *True as the Stars Above*, Victor Gallacz, London, 2000. p. 230.
9. The suggestion here is of the lightning flash from the Divine Source illuminating the essence of Sylvia so that Ted sees her, as he writes the poem, stripped of the shadows formed in his memory by later events.
10. The phrase appears, for example, in two letters. One addressed to Antonio Canigiani: 'De musica: On music' (No. 92); and one to "Alessandro Braccesi, a priest of the Muses", 'Vera poesis a Deo ad Deum: True poetry is from God and for God' (No. 131). *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*: translated by members of the Language Department of the London School of Economic Science, Shepherd-Walwyn, London, 1978.
11. *ibid.* Letter 7, 'De divino furore. On divine frenzy'.
12. Neil Spencer disagrees with my comments about astrological jargon. As an astrologer he finds that part of the poem "crucial information and very eloquent". For him, it demonstrates that "the evening was heavy with portents" and it explains exactly how Ted and Sylvia were married by the solar system. In a letter to me (12/12/2001) he wrote: "[Ted's] and Sylvia's charts were both struck strongly by that night's transits – hence they were 'married'. Principal transit mentioned for this is "the day's Sun in The Fish" (Pisces) which fell on Sylvia's ascendant and opposite Ted's Neptune (Ascendant equals self, Neptune is idealism / glamour / love-struck – also opposite the ascendant (first House of Self) is the seventh House of Marriage!). Ted mentions some other overlaps. Their charts were heavily entwined, so that on March 25th the planets hit them both". Neil writes, too, that the Jupiter / Moon conjunction spelt "disastrous expense" especially for Ted, "because it 'combust' his Sun. 'Combust' is a mediaeval term referring to the Sun being too close to another planet and thus scorching it. He's taking poetic licence – Jup / Moon can't combust his Sun because they don't have fire. But he's got the point. He was blown up by the night's major aspect. Interestingly he does not mention Pluto that's also present between the Moon and Jupiter, now that really will blow you up – but then Ted really was a Renaissance astrologer".
13. Sylvia's journal entries for July and August 1957 show her struggling with bad dreams and mood swings. She was trying out ideas for stories and poems but

despairing of writing them, and she was terrified that she might be pregnant.

14. Sylvia began teaching at Smith College in September 1957. Ted began teaching at the Amhurst campus of the University of Massachusetts at the end of January 1958.

15. "... the Great Goddess... can be seen as the creative womb of the inchoate waters, gradually refining into human form, and everywhere tending to be fish-tailed". (SGCB 6).

16. The Northern Sea-robin of the Cape Cod area is a small, bottom-dwelling fish with spiny fins, a bony head and notably blue eyes. It is not bad eating but is generally regarded as scrap and used in pet-food. The name, linking 'sea' and 'robin' is beautifully apt for Ted's purposes in this poem, because it marries the Goddess to the God, whose bird in Northern folk-lore is the robin redbreast.

17. Ted's first book of poetry, *Hawk In The Rain*, was published in England and in America in September 1957.

18. Throughout *Birthday Letters*, America symbolizes a land of promise, the New World and a mythical El Dorado.

19. The Economic Research and Development Group website (www.horseshoecrab.org/) provides a wealth of information about the Horseshoe Crab.

20. Robert Graves makes this identification in *The White Goddess* in the course of his discussion of the Triple Goddess and her golden apples. (TWG 255).

21. The requirement made of those accepting this award was that they live for at least three months outside Great Britain and Ireland. After months of excited planning and preparation for a trip to Italy, Sylvia finally wrote to tell her mother that Ted had given up the award and she was relieved that "the strain of going to Italy" was not "on top of us any more" (SPLH 25 August 1961).

22. The Devonian dialect can be impenetrable to strangers and there are still traces in it of the old Celtic language of the first Britons.

23. In 'Lady Lazarus' (SPCP 244-7), she claims of her projected suicide: "This is Number Three".

24. Considering Sylvia's identification of Otto with The Colossus and with Thor, it is interesting to note that The Statue of Liberty, the female icon which symbolizes America, is (in the poem inscribed on its base) "The New Colossus / Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame" but "a mighty woman with a torch / whose flame is imprisoned lightning"; she is "Mother of Exiles" who stands at "the golden door". (Emma Lazarus. 1883).

25. Ted's note in SPCP (p. 292) suggests that the contract was signed in 1962, Anne

Stevenson gives the earlier date in *Bitter Fame* (p. 226) and the reason for its postponement. Sylvia refers to this in a letter to her mother on 20 November 1961 (SPLH).

26. Anne Stevenson suggests that this name “was drawn from Ted’s world”, ‘Victoria’ from Vicky, his cousin, and ‘Lucas’ from Lucas Myers (BF 227). However, considering the discord between Sylvia and Ted at that time, and Sylvia’s fierce independence, that explanation seems unlikely.

27. ‘The Signature’, Stonepicker, Bloodaxe Books, 2001 (p. 75). Interview with Libby Purves, *The Times* (Features), December 1999.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalChariot cardCheth path
The Path of The Chariot - Cheth

Tarot card 7. Tree path 8.

Joining Sephiroth 3 (Binah) and 5 (Gevurah).

‘The Shot’, ‘The Blue Flannel Suit’, ‘The Lodger’, ‘The Inscription’.
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‘The Chariot’ in traditional Tarot packs depicts a crowned Martial warrior standing in a square chariot pulled by two galloping horses. The figure stands firmly between pillars which support a canopy or veil. On each shoulder is a face – male and female or sun and moon – and he holds no reins. He is an emblem of energy, judgement, balance and control. Only one who knows his own powers and can assess and judge the situation second-by-second can maintain such balance, borne along as he is by the turning wheels of an earthly (4: square) chariot drawn by powerful natural energies, which may often pull in different directions, as the horses do on the traditional Tarot cards¹. Pride, overconfidence, the slightest lack of attention, judgement or balance, and the ride will end in disaster.

The number of this card is 7 (4 + 3, representing the Earth plus the Divine Trinity of Sephiroth at the apex of the Cabbalistic Tree and, especially, The Goddess - Binah). The Divine energies are hidden by the veil above or behind the human warrior in this Chariot of Life and he or she must learn to know their own strengths and weaknesses in order bring the journey to a safe conclusion. The Cabbalistic phrases for meditation on this path are 'The Chariot of Life. Lord of Triumphant Light. Sangraal'. And the planet controlling this path is Mars, whose fierce energies may be directed towards good or evil and may be both courageous and cruel².

The Hebrew letter for this path, Cheth (meaning 'fence'), embodies all these things. Cheth is made up of the two previous letters, Vau and Zain, and it contains the energies of both³: the dynamic life energies of the Divine which, on this path, empower the traveller and remain protectively close ("like an eagle protecting its young") but which allow complete freedom of expression and judgement – complete self-reliance.

The Path of Cheth lies on the Pillar of Form between Binah (Sephira 3), who is Mother of Form and The Possibility of Boundaries, and Gevurah (Sephira 5), which is Judgement, Power, Severity, The Expression of Form (its preservation or destruction), and The Response to Boundaries (the setting of limits or fences). Judgement (Gevurah) implies Laws, restraint and emotional control and Cheth is a dynamic path of 'Run and Return', a path of individuation, on which the traveller moves between polarities, running and returning between freedom and restraint, form and chaos, splendour and degradation. Balance is essential and the traveller must learn their own limits and use this learning to balance the energies of Gevurah (Judgement) with those of its partner, Chesed (Mercy); and to be in harmony with the Divine and Natural energies within themselves and in the world at large.

This path is filled with the continuous, spiralling energies of life. Its number is 8 – a closed, spiralling figure. 8 is the Caduceus – the entwined double helix of snakes: positive and negative energies in perfect balance. 8 is the number of Mercury / Hermes whose dynamic energies may guide the Soul to the Divine but may also misguide the unwary and unwise. 8 is also the number of the Divine Feminine, the Water Principle, the ebb and flow which is the pulse of life.

In the Birthday Letters poem on the Path of The Chariot in the Atziluthic World of Archetypes, it is Sylvia who rides in the Chariot of Life.

In 'The Shot' (BL 16), Sylvia's need for a god is uncontrolled, unbalanced, Foolish. She is, like the archetype figure on this path, "a god-seeker", but this is still the start of her Cabbalistic journey and she is immature and still learning about herself and the world. So, her worship which "needed a god" and which "seemed to have been designed at birth for a god" is expressed as infatuation.

In the normal process of growing up, children should learn all they need to become confident, independent individuals – to 'stand on their own two feet', so-to-speak, like the rider in The Chariot. Wise parents provide the freedom, security and encouragement

which allows this individuation to take place.

But circumstances, for Sylvia, were not normal. It is clear from her stories and journals that her goals were set for her by, especially, her father. His expectations and demands of her were high. He aimed her “at God”, perhaps only in the sense that this is a metaphor for the highest achievements. Yet, as for many young children, Sylvia’s first god was her father. Otto’s death, before maturity and experience allowed her to judge him and the world more realistically, set this pattern (this Form) with a force which, in Ted’s poem, was sustained through the whole of her “Alpha career”. This choice of phrase is important, because it encompasses Sylvia’s high A-grade achievements throughout her life and also the Cabbalistic meanings of Alpha: the Fool, the Self, and the first of the repeated Cabbalistic journeys a seeker of Truth will make in their lifetime⁴.

As in ‘The Shot’, the death of Sylvia’s father really did trigger a pattern of events and emotions which powerfully shaped her life and her work. She acknowledged this in many of her journal entries, especially those from December 1958 onwards, and she fought hard to understand it and to deal with it. Ted makes it clear in his essay, ‘Sylvia Plath and Her Journals’ (WP 117-190), that Sylvia’s first journey (her Alpha journey) towards individuation and re-birth of the “nucleus of self” (WP 180) reached a critical stage in 1959, and Sylvia’s own writings confirm this. Early in that year, Sylvia came to see that from the time of her father’s death the god-like status she had endowed on him remained fixed: that she had lived for twenty years in a dream, “a wintering”, in which she had come “God-fathered into the world” as if the real man had never existed. For all that time, she had remained immature and childlike – in her “dress of innocence” (‘Electra on Azalea Path’, SPCP 116-7). Sylvia’s recognition of the damage this had done to her is expressed, too, in her poem, ‘The Colossus’ (SPCP 129-30) and this re-assessment of her father was the start of her re-awakening from the dream and the re-birth of her new independent self.

This re-birth dragged on, Ted writes, only to be completed by the appearance of a “new self-conquering self” in 1962. But the world continued to turn and Sylvia’s newfound self was vulnerable. In a paragraph which uses the imagery of the Martian warrior and the underlying Cabbalistic meaning of The Chariot and Cheth, Ted writes:

That her new self, who could do so much, could not ultimately save her, is perhaps only to say what has often been learned on this particular field of conflict – that the moment of turning one’s back on the enemy who seems safely defeated, and is defeated, is the most dangerous moment of all. And that there can be no guarantees. (WP 189-90). This moment of danger at the end of the Alpha journey, this most vulnerable time when Sylvia was newly independent, alone and “Godless”, accepting no human or spiritual authority, is, I think, the time Ted refers to near the end of ‘The Shot’ when he recognized that, shaman / witchdoctor though he was, he was not “the right witchdoctor” at that time to save Sylvia from disaster.

He acknowledges, too, that although he had been more than just “mind-stuff /

Provisional. Speculative”, like the “ordinary jocks”⁵ Sylvia had elected to god status before she met him, he was, in the end, another of those wounded men she had left in her “flightpath”. Sylvia’s journals, especially the entries for the time before she met Ted, show just how rational, analytical and calculating she was about her relationships with men. She did not “believe in God as a kind father in the sky” (SPJ entry 48, 1950/51) but she deified and worshipped each chosen man: “I made him into a golden god, physically, morally and mentally” she wrote of one early boyfriend (10 Jan. 1953); “be christ!”, she exhorted Richard Sassoon (22 Nov. 1955).

Her journals show, too, her continuous and careful self-analysis and the boundaries she tested as she ricocheted from man to man and from panic and “sob-soaked” despair, to ecstasy. But the “undeflected” trajectory on which she had been launched by her father’s death was a “Run and Return” from a false god back to that same false god: her “whole life” “true” to one “god-seeking” path which ended when Sylvia, as Ted writes chillingly, came “at last” to “bury” herself in the heart of that god – her Daddy.

Ted’s eventual understanding of the power with which Sylvia had been launched on her path through life, and of his own powerlessness, in the end, to change that path, is seen again in ‘The Blue Flannel Suit’ (BL 67), which is the poem on the Path of The Chariot in the World of Briah.

The opening phrase, “I let it grow”, expresses Ted’s remorse, as much as his powerlessness, for anything he did, or did not, do at the time when Sylvia faced her professional teaching experience at Smith College. Whether or not he could have changed things is something he would never know but he begins the poem by confessing to the ‘Vice’ of Binah, which is inertia, and by acknowledging the two errors which are the qliphoth of Binah and Gevurah - Fatalism (“I had supposed it was all OK”); and Bureaucracy (submission to the “Financiers and committees and consultants” who had put Sylvia in this position in front of the class and who would judge her).

Judgement, severity and fear, all energies of Gevurah, are everywhere in this poem. It begins with Ted’s own judgement of himself, for which he is condemned to be permanently stilled in contemplation of Sylvia’s death. It continues with the judgement of all those whose hopes and ambitions and support had brought Sylvia to the moment of “that first morning” of her professional teaching career and who, in reality or metaphorically, were watching to see if she would justify their own actions. And it culminates in “the life that judged” Sylvia, which could refer to Otto, on whose teaching life Sylvia was modelling her own, but also, in a Cabbalistic sense, to the life-pattern to which Sylvia was submitting herself and within which she was testing boundaries and standards which were set for her by others.

That this pattern, this life, these boundaries were not Sylvia’s own, is indicated by the compromise she made in wearing the blue flannel suit, and which Ted describes as a “Half-approximation” (capitalized at the start of a line for emphasis) of Sylvia’s idea of “the proprieties” (this final phrase is carefully chosen and precise and indicates Sylvia’s own judgement of rightness and fitness, as well as of correct behaviour). That Sylvia

wanted to “ease into” these proprieties indicates, too, that she already knew this pattern set by others was too rigid and not her own, and that she was compromising both in dress and in her values and goals. The importance of this whole compromise is indicated by Ted’s use of “the blue flannel suit” as the title of the poem.

Sylvia’s ultimate goal was to write, not to teach, but she thought that teaching would be a means to that end. So Sylvia’s judgement, too, is part of this poem, as is her courage (the ‘Virtue’ of Gevurah), her fear and her misery. Sylvia’s own judgement of herself is as severe and rigid as the other judgements to which she submits herself. And, in the poem, this “straitjacket” to which she condemns herself, like a prisoner, leads her finally to death.

Ted’s judgement of Sylvia as he sees her “now” in this poem, is, in contrast to all the other judgements in the poem, full of tenderness and love. The images he uses – of her “green” fear; of her helplessness; of “the lonely / Girl (the capital and the choice of word emphasizing that she is still an immature traveller in Life’s Chariot) who was going to die” (“going to” suggesting both her determination and her eventual fate); and of himself stilled “Bending so briefly” over her still form in the open coffin – all are images which evoke powerful feelings of pity and sympathy in the reader. By this means, Ted tempers Judgement with Mercy.

It is, perhaps, hard for anyone who does not share the belief Ted had in powerful occult energies to appreciate the complexity of what he was doing in this poem and the dangers he would have believed were inherent in his actions. Firstly, he was working on three levels. Not only was he recording the past, he was recreating the events and the energies which fuelled them in his own present as he wrote the poem, and (if the poem was successful) he would be recreating them in the mind of anyone who read it. Secondly, the energies on this particular path are extremely powerful and must be treated with the utmost care and respect. Thirdly, the World of Briah is a world in which patterns are formed which may crystalize and become fixed in our own, Earthly, World of Yetzirah.

So, in the final lines of this poem, Ted is careful to bring all the energies he has evoked in it to a standstill. He does this by creating a poetic charm in which the word “stilled” is repeated three times (for magical effectiveness) and he and Sylvia, “then” and “now”, are brought “permanently” into the circle of this charm. The reader is left with an image of them together, with Ted permanently bending briefly over Sylvia’s open coffin as he is, metaphorically, throughout Birthday Letters.

In ‘The Blue Flannel Suit’ the severe energies of Gevurah predominate, but in ‘The Lodger’ (BL 124-6), which is the poem on this same path in the World of Yetzirah, it is Binah (Sephira 3), the Triple Goddess, the Mother of Form whose powers prevail. Not only is the poem full of the natural energies of fertility and gestation and the eternal cycles of birth and death, it is also full of the influence these had on Ted’s life as he and Sylvia settled into their home in Devon.

As in 'The Error', Ted again associates Devon with The New World. Potatoes, tubers which are a fine example of Nature's enduring energies, begin the poem⁶. Potatoes are reputed to have been brought to England from The New World by Sir Walter Raleigh (a Devon man and a poet), and here in the poem they are likened to the "welcome wagon", a gift of basic provisions with which small pioneer communities in America once greeted new neighbours. For Ted and Sylvia, in their own new world, potatoes were the "first fruits" of their own yard. And Ted, a "Pioneer" in their new Devon life (and on this Cabbalistic path where the life energies test the traveller so thoroughly) bought the essential basics with which to learn self-sufficiency: the spades, forks, overalls, boots (all of which are very necessary for a gardener) and the books. Not just any books but "The books!". Ted's emphatic repetition of "the books" is the first indication that there was more, perhaps, to his horticultural endeavours than simply digging his Devon yard.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note the books which Ted has spoken of reading at that time, although in Cabbalistic terms (exactly as in the garden) book-learning may impart necessary knowledge but hard practical work is needed in order to gain understanding. Two books, in particular, were important enough for Ted to discuss them in his interviews with Ekbert Faas in 1970 and 1977, and to refer to them again in his Foreword to his own book, *The Difficulties of a Bridegroom*, which was published in 1995. These were the Buddhist text, the *Bardo Thodol* (The Tibetan Book of the Dead), and *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, by the seventeenth-century Hermeticist, Johann Valentin Andreae. Both these books are, in Ted's words, to do with "a shamanic flight and return" and the alchemical process of enlightenment and healing. In other words, they are texts which teach the art of living and dying: the horticulture of the heart and soul. And Ted, in 'The Lodger' is "gluttonous to swallow all horticulture / the whole cornucopia".

So, on this path on which the Cabbalistic journeyer must dig into their own heart and soul and learn to know the Self, Ted "double-dug". This is a gardening term which describes a method by which the old surface soil is buried and the deeper soil brought to the surface: essentially, everything is turned upside-down, which is a very precise metaphor for any process of self-analysis designed to reveal hidden depths. And Ted, so he tells us, double-dug "The entire garden. And my heart". He puts 'garden' and 'heart' into two separate sentences but isolates them in a single line which is linked by the momentum of the poem to both the line above it and the line below. The garden, it seems, is double-dug, and so is the heart; and whatever lives in the heart digs with Ted.

Lucas Myers, in *Crow Steered Bergs Appeared*, comments that 'The Lodger' "should be read quite literally" (CSBA 78). He confirms that the heart condition which Ted describes so graphically and with such reality in the poem really did exist. Myers writes that "There were signs of it before they moved to Devon in September 1961" and he believes that the fibrillations ended in winter or spring of 1962 when Ted "decided not to die"⁹. Yet, it is perfectly possible to read this poem quite literally at two levels. Ted would have learned, from the books he was reading at that time, that in a physical and a metaphorical sense, "my heart was me. I was my heart." And in 'The Lodger' he pays a good deal more attention to his heart than to his potatoes.

Both Ted's reading and his writing in 1960/61/62 dealt with the heart and with living and dying. He has said that *The Chemical Wedding* of Christian Rosencreutz influenced him so strongly that "around 1962" he gave the "working title", *Difficulties of a Bridegroom*, to everything he wrote "for the next few years" (DOB ix). Late in 1960, Ted was also working on a libretto based on the *Bardo Thodol*¹⁰, and this work was reflected in his play, *The Wound*¹¹, which he later called "a Gothic-Celtic version of the *Bardo Thodol*" and which explores the experiences of a man who is shot, enters the realm to which souls go immediately after death (the *Bardo*) but returns to our own world with the help of a young, female spirit-guide.

In its setting, theme, and some of its characters, *The Wound* appears very like a sequel to an earlier play, *The House of Aries*, which was broadcast on the BBC Third Programme on 16 November 1960. One of the characters in *The House of Aries* is called, 'The Lodger', and this is not the only link between this play and the *Birthday Letters* poem of that name. Not only is the 'House of Aries' an astrological term denoting the first House of a horoscope (the House which deals with the Self), but the play also presents the extremes (the boundaries) of male and female natures; and the play's underlying message (given through the two female characters, who each represent a priestess of the Goddess: the Virgin and the Whore) is of the need to balance cruelty and the Law with love and mercy¹².

The Lodger, in *The House of Aries*, is a scholar of "the vital thing---society's sanity, peace; that is, the Law". He concentrates on his books and has never married, because he believes that "some men marry what must be done" and he is "Married to the Law". The virginal Elaine calls him "a sort of St. George" but she tells him "you sit in your room too much". The whorish Wife is blunter: "All that spirit stiffened into a bookmark! "... " You should learn to love me, boy / You need kisses, sweet kisses / To soften your nature". With this scenario in mind, there is a certain irony in Ted's emphasis on "The Books!" in his *Birthday Letters* poem 'The Lodger'.

Importantly, the Lodger in Ted's play is woken to a new awareness of Self by Elaine. He sees this as "an indictment: / Court summons by lip and cheek", and he feels judged: "It seems I am guilty". He expresses it as love, and he wants to marry Elaine but is captured trying to escape with her and is shot. His awakening can be interpreted as 'the call' by which the Shaman is first made aware of The Goddess's power. It can, in Ted's terms, also be interpreted as the sudden awareness of the Poetic Self - the other self, a "doppelganger", and "the true self" (WP 275) - which lies beneath the mask of Ego. Ted discusses this awakening in detail in his essay on T.S. Eliot, *A Dancer to God*¹³, referring to the Poetic Self's "hidden life" and calling it "the voice of Eros". In this same essay he writes in similar terms of Yeats's shamanic call; and in his long essay on Coleridge, 'The Snake in the Oak' (WP 373-465), he again details his belief in the presence of this other Self - the Poetic Self - which is woken to power by the Goddess. The seat of the Goddess within us is the heart, and to refuse the shamanic call, as Ted told Ekbert Fass (UU 206), means death - real or metaphorical (and for Coleridge, Ted saw it as the death of his Goddess-inspired, Poetic Self).

Given all this, it is hard not to read Ted's poem 'The Lodger' as a description of his own shamanic call: The Goddess's call to judgement of himself through which his Poetic Self (his true self) could be released. Ted, in the poem, is physically and mentally (if we accept an intentional ambivalence) immersed in the Goddess's realm but he has reached a limit of some kind which has unbalanced his natural energies. The Goddess, whose energies are the pulse of life, has touched him in his heart¹⁴. Yet, it seems that Ted does not immediately recognize her call. Instead, he exhibits the Vice of Binah which is inertia, and the Qlippoth (or Error) of Binah, which is Fatalism. There is humorous self-mockery in the excesses of fatalism and hypochondria which Ted describes in this poem as he looks back at his younger self: he is an unwilling player of "Russian roulette", he is "going to die", is "already a discard", "already posthumous", his momentum merely the inertias "of what" he "had been".

Fludd picture

He mocks his own hypochondria, but the symptoms were real enough. Yet from what was he "a discard"? Not just from life, he says, but from "the intact, creating, resounding realm / where music poured". And for the Cabbalist, the Hermeticist and the poet, music is fundamental. Pythagorean number theory (which underlies Hermetic and Cabbalistic numerology) was based on the harmonies of Orpheus's lyre, and Orpheus was the first poet. For them, the whole world consists of harmony and number, and our human arts are but faint echoes of that first, harmonious, cosmic music. For Ted, writing about art in 'The Hanged Man and the Dragonfly' (WP 84-102)¹⁵, music was "the sap of mathematical law; a secretion from the gulf itself - the organizing and creative energy itself" (WP 92). Yet in 'The Lodger', Ted cannot reach this organizing, creative energy; cannot conduct it through his "aorta" to obtain "release" from the "errata" his heart, so he assumes that he is doomed or that his Poetic Self has died.

Ted's choice of the word 'errata', echoes the title of the poem which immediately precedes this one in Birthday Letters, and it again suggests that his heart symptoms had a Cabbalistic meaning for him. This suggestion is reinforced by the simile Ted chose to describe that "double fisted blow" which "came down" between his shoulder blades: "Soft but stunning like the kick of a camel". Not many readers will have had first-hand experience of the kick of a camel, so the simile will have little meaning for most. And nothing in Ted's situation in the poem or in that Devon setting can explain the presence of this camel. So what is it doing here? Cabbala, again, provides an answer which is relevant to this path and suggests what Ted eventually concluded to be the source of his heart troubles. 'Camel' is the meaning for the Hebrew letter 'Gimel' which identifies Path number 3 on the Cabbalistic Tree: the number associated with the Sephira Binah, and the Path identified in Tarot with The High Priestess who transmits and protects the Divine energies on Earth.

The presence of both the camel and the cat in 'The Lodger' can be interpreted as signs of the urgent presence of The Goddess in Ted's life: she who governs the pulse of life and who Ted calls "the wary, wily old long-breathed witch Nature" (WP 440). Yet, although the Goddess is responsible for that "whole cornucopia" which Ted aimed "to

swallow", and she is closely associated in the poem with his heart's errata, she is clearly not the "alien joker" who is "using" Ted's heart and sharing his and Sylvia's skins in the final lines of the poem. So who is this?

The answer which springs immediately to mind, is "Otto", Sylvia's father, the man who was an expert on bees and who "Hid behind" Ted in the first poem on this path, 'The Shot' (BL 16). It was Otto, Sylvia was conjuring into her poems, and Otto is the "ghost" Ted describes as "re-appearing" in Sylvia's work early in 1962.

Yet it was Ted who knew that bees had long been regarded as priestesses of The Goddess¹⁶. It was Ted's Poetic Self who had for years been "spellbound by Yeats"; who regarded Yeats as the presiding "judge"¹⁷ of his own writing; and who would have remembered the bees and the "Nine bean rows" in Yeats's poem, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'; and it was Ted who would have known that the bean is associated both with The Goddess and with ghosts¹⁸.

It is Ted's ordinary, everyday self which, in 'The Lodger', digs the garden, studies the books, starts "a diary - observations" of the heart's errata, and studies "all the ways a heart can kill its owner" and just how his own heart "had killed" him so that he "could not reach the music". It is his Poetic Self which is, I think, the "alien joker", whose Mercurial cupidity and trickery are part of the energies encountered on this path.

Ted's Poetic Self is, as he says Eliot's was, "the keeper of dreams", the "doppelganger", "co-tenant", with the ordinary ego, of the heart and skin. This is the self which may "contain, in its vitals and so to speak genetic nucleus, the true self, the self at the source, that inmost core of the individual" (WP 275) and which must make its presence known in whatever way it can.

Critical to this interpretation, is the imagery of mirrors in the final lines of the poem. Mirrors, traditionally, are believed to reflect the soul of those looking into them. Graves notes that they were "part of the Mysteries, and probably stood for 'Know thy self'"¹⁹: exactly the lesson which must be learned on this Cabbalistic path. But the mirrored soul, the doppelganger, the hidden self, may appear to the ordinary ego as a monstrous, nightmarish, unacceptable figure²⁰. This is exactly the image Ted saw when his ordinary self gazed over Sylvia's shoulder as she "polished" her poems: the terrible image of Otto, which in Sylvia's poems at that time was becoming almost indistinguishable from himself. Otto, who stood behind Ted in 'The Shot', like a shadow, may well have seemed to him like the embodiment of the darkest aspects of himself: the "usurping brother" (the Boar of his later analysis of Shakespeare's work). This was the ghost / self which he tried to ignore, superstitiously fearing that it might take him over if he acknowledged its reflection in the poem-mirrors.

But in what way was this alien joker also sharing Sylvia's skin? In what way could it evict them both?

My interpretation, here, is tentative but is based on what the Birthday Letters poems, up

to this point in the sequence, have already shown. Ted and Sylvia began their marriage and their poetic journey as a shared enterprise. They worked together as equals, sharing their lives and their thoughts to the extent that Ted later said: "we had become so close, we had worked together so closely, it was uncanny - as if we had become one person"²¹. He also said: "Our minds soon became two parts of one operation. We dreamed a lot of shared or complementary dreams. Our telepathy was intrusive"²². In that sense, their Poetic Selves shared the same skin, although each expressed it quite differently in their work.

"Throughout our time together", Ted said, "we looked at each others verses at every stage - up to the Ariel poems of October 1962, which was when we separated": but in terms of their poetic endeavours the relationship had long been unbalanced. In a letter to Aurelia Plath, written after Sylvia's death, Ted said that from 1956, the focus had been on Sylvia's poetic rebirth: "We assumed my writing would carry on anyway somehow. Our great anxiety was for hers....She thought as I did that mine could look after itself"²³. And, in the Birthday Letters sequence, ever since 'Epiphany' (BL 113) when Ted rejected the untamed energies of Nature and opted for an ordinary domestic role, he has depicted himself as sleepwalking after Sylvia and supporting her as she finds her poetic rebirth. This sleepwalker was the ordinary ego which was still in charge after the move to Devon. This, for Ted, was the Lodger his Poetic Self (which he regarded as the true self) had come to evict.

For Sylvia, too, the ordinary (but damaged) ego had been dominant until September 1961 when her Ariel voice was finally born and (as Ted describes in 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals') her conflict with The Other began. This Other, Ted said, was "the fateful part of her being", the part "which had tried to kill her and had all but succeeded" but which had had "a homoeopathic effect on the nucleus that survived"(WP 187). Ariel was, I think, that nucleus: Sylvia's Poetic Self, who had come to evict the dark Other who, for so long, had been her Lodger. The Other in Sylvia's poem of that title (SPCP 201) is "White Nike", dark Moon Goddess, "sick one", to whom Sylvia has given birth but who "Assumes, like a meathook, the burden of his [my emphasis] parts": Husband / Father / Otto trying, she says, to "insert" himself "Between myself and myself". The final line of Sylvia's poem shows her defiant and undefeated in this deathly battle.

The poem on the Path of The Chariot in the World of Assiah is 'The Inscription' (BL 172). In a pre-publication list of poems which Ted sent to his editor at Faber and Faber, Christopher Reid, the poem in this position in the Birthday Letters sequence was 'The Laburnum'. At some stage he crossed this out, wrote "Delete" next to it and "Replace with: The Inscription". Almost certainly, Ted wrote several poems, or drafts of poems, as he meditated on each Cabbalistic path and, although both pre-publication lists in my possession show insertions and changes, both show that Ted intended eighty-eight poems to be published.

'The Laburnum' was published in the limited edition of one-hundred-and-ten copies of *Howls and Whispers*²⁴, illustrated by Leonard Baskin and published by Gehenna Press in 1998. All the poems in this book might have been part of the Birthday Letters

sequence but Ted chose either to include an alternative poem on the same theme (as with 'The Minotaur') or, perhaps because the poem was too personal or too judgemental of others (as with 'The Laburnum'), to limit their exposure to the public.

Both 'The Inscription' and 'The Laburnum' suit this particular Cabbalistic path. Both are set in the period after Ted and Sylvia separated in October 1962, and there are a number of lines which are common to both. 'The Laburnum' begins: "Tell me / We shall sit together this summer / Under the laburnum.", and this same phrase occurs in the middle of 'The Inscription'. Ted's response, "Yes...yes yes yes", in both poems is the same, and the four lines following it are almost identical. In 'The Laburnum', however, Ted uses the personal pronouns 'you' and 'I' throughout: in 'The Inscription' he uses the third person pronouns 'she' and 'he', 'her' and 'his', which is less personal and gives the poem more general meaning.

In both poems, the atmosphere is wintry and the protagonists uncertain of themselves and of each other, and unsure of their direction: they are, in effect, out of control in the Chariot of Life.

In 'The Laburnum' the judgmental and retributive energies of Gevurah predominate and Sylvia, as in 'The Blue Flannel Suit', follows the advice and directions of others. The poem is angry and harsh, especially about Sylvia's mother, whose advice is likened to "poisonous laburnum seeds, sprinkling her pages". Sylvia repeatedly asks for "only the truth" but "They" console (a strange choice of word, here) her with "howls from their own divorce" and with "the revenge " she "could not find" in herself, whilst assuring her they are her "true friends". The poem ends with betrayal. Having dropped their poisonous seeds, destroyed the tree which for Sylvia represented joy and hope, and opened up her grave, "They stepped back to let it happen". This poem about revenge, retribution and guilt is, itself, angry and judgemental: which is, perhaps, why Ted chose the equally bleak but far more loving and forgiving poem, 'The Inscription', for Birthday Letters.

'The Inscription' begins in frost and snow. The life energies are frozen "Hard / Cold.". But the sooty, brick-reflected sun which shines into Ted's "morning" flat is bright. His new life, alone in his Soho flat, has the empty, "Cargo-dumped" lightness of an empty packing case about it. Throughout the poem (unusually in Birthday Letters) Ted uses third person pronouns, so that it is no longer just himself and Sylvia who are separated and meet again amidst the confused emotions common to such situations, but Male and Female, two halves of the sort of Hermetic, complementary whole which he and Sylvia had been for most of their marriage.

She now carries "the missing supplies", and it is "her" energies - her warmth, curiosity, love, jealousy and suspicion (all the energies of Binah and The Goddess) - which melt a "rigid lightning" path (a nice realistic representation of the lightning flash from the Divine Source) through the frozen sea to his "islet or reef or rock". Her approach is purely natural and instinctive. She hunts him out "like a dog" hunts a rat. But what she wants is his assurance of a shared future and reassurance of his faith in her. She is no longer in control of herself: neither is he. He does not understand what she wants; and his

rational judgement of her requests, and both their responses, suggest the confusion in them both.

What he should have done, Ted says in retrospect, is trust his instincts: “he should have grabbed” and put his trust completely in love. She, too, is torn between jealousy and love. Both are going back and forth (“Run and Return”) along this path, blocked by barriers which they might have surmounted but didn’t. No guide appears in this dark World of Assiah to help them, only malign tricksters, like Sylvia’s advisors in ‘The Laburnum’ or the jealous spirit which prompts her to open the “red Oxford Shakespeare” and to read the inscription written there by her rival.

It seems, at first, that it is the inscription written in the Oxford Shakespeare which makes the woman carry on like a wounded but still “running animal”, her happiness no longer “invulnerable” as it once had been. But the ambiguity of ‘she’ and ‘her’ throughout the last fourteen lines of the poem, and the lack of end stops in these lines, suggests that it is also her own “words from nowhere” which have left her “Helpless-handed”. These lines, themselves, run like frightened animals and confuse the present of the poem with a past in which he and she had once been so close that her wounding words had “gone through her and hit him”. This confusion is, I think, deliberate, and throughout the poem Ted uses the symbolism of the laburnum tree and of the inscription for double purposes.

Laburnum picture

In reality, as in the poem, the laburnum tree was of special significance to Sylvia. She knew it as the Golden Rain Tree and the Bean Tree, and both she and Ted would have known of its association with The Goddess in myth and poetry, where its golden flowers represent the full summer sunshine of the Goddess’s life-giving energies whilst its poisonous seeds embody her deathly powers²⁵. Sylvia was delighted when she discovered laburnum trees growing in her Devon garden and wrote to her mother: “Isn’t it odd that I’ve written about Golden Rain Trees in my book and now have six” (SPLH 7 June 1962). But in both ‘The Laburnum’ and ‘The Inscription’, the tree is deathly: like a “huge clock” it strikes “noon noon noon”, like a warning chime tolling the passing noontime of golden summer flowers (the time, perhaps, when happiness seemed invulnerable) and presaging the growth of poisonous winter seeds. In early 1961, at the time when Sylvia ripped Ted’s red Oxford Shakespeare “to rags”²⁶ she had thought their “happiness was invulnerable”. Perhaps, then, it was. But in 1962, at the time when she was elated by her poetic rebirth and the arrival of her Ariel voice, it was not: and she tested it in angry poems in which she sought to destroy the God Otto / Ted, her dark Other.

Ted, with his knowledge of magic, was deeply superstitious. He well knew the power of words, and, in magic, the inscription by hand of words (or symbols) on paper, stone or metal is especially powerful. Sylvia, too, knew the power of words. She wrote a poem about ‘The Courage of Shutting Up’ (SPCP 209-10), but she vented her feelings in her poetry: and words (as she wrote in her poem of this title) are “Axes” (SPCP 270). It was just such words / axes which “cut” and “tore up” the laburnum tree in Ted’s poem ‘The Laburnum’; it was the words of the inscription which “she” read in the resurrected

Oxford Shakespeare in “his” flat, which was the “fatal bullet” that set her running like a wounded animal; and it was, I suggest, “her words from nowhere” dictated by her Ariel voice and inscribed in her poems, which weakened Sylvia’s “hold” on Ted and “Fatally” wounded them both²⁷.

There is no blame in the poem. The words come from nowhere and go through her to hit him²⁸. Perhaps, had ‘she’ allowed love and mercy to surmount jealousy, judgement and guilt when she read (or wrote) the inscription the wound might not have been fatal. Had ‘he’ not trusted logic but love - not “reeled when he should have grabbed” - he, too, might have avoided the fatal wound. But neither had the strength or understanding at that time, so The Chariot of Life carried them on to disaster.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. In some Tarot packs one of the horses drawing the Chariot is black, the other white, to symbolize opposing energies in Nature. It is interesting to note that practitioners of the Chinese occult science, feng-shui (literally ‘wind-water’: the art of living in harmony with nature), are sometimes known as k’an-yü sien-sheng: ‘masters of the canopied chariot’.
2. The card has close links with the teachings of Krishna when he visited Arjuna on the field of battle in the Sanskrit poem, The Bhagavad Gita. See especially Chapter 3. V. 1-11 (Mascaro. J (Trans.), Penguin, 1982).
3. The Mystical Significance of Hebrew Letters (Cheth)
4. Like Alchemy, the Cabbalistic process is never complete. Always, “At the end of the ritual / up comes a goblin”, as Ted noted on the final page of Cave Birds (CB 62).
5. This term is not one which Sylvia ever seems to have used in her work. It is a jeering, slang term which was once used in Northern England to denote the lowest, dirtiest sailors, generally those working on colliery ships. Ted’s use of it may suggest some jealousy on his part over Sylvia’s earlier men friends but this is unlikely. More likely, is that he used it to emphasize the very ordinary, earthy, mortal nature of these men and the extent of Sylvia’s emotional excesses - both of which are evident in her journals.
6. In Sylvia’s poem ‘Poems. Potatoes’ (SPCP 106), she compares poems with potatoes and concludes that the potato “Bunches its knobby browns on a vastly superior page”.
7. Faas, E. The Unaccommodated Universe, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1980. pp. 205-6, 209-10. p. 212.
8. It is relevant to note that this book brings together work which Ted regarded as comprising “a psycho-poetical autobiography” (this is part of the inscription which Ted wrote in the copy of the book which he gave to me).

9. Myers, himself, is cryptic in his comments about this poem. He does not explain what he thought Ted meant when he “decided not to die”, although he says that, to him “the meaning was clear”. Nor does he explain “the alien force” which Ted describes in the poem or his own comment that Ted “decided to evict it” and “successfully did so” (CSBA 78).

10. This libretto was begun in collaboration with the composer, Chou Wen-Chung, with whom Ted had become friendly whilst he and Sylvia were at Yaddo in 1959.

11. The Wound was broadcast by the BBC Third Programme on 1 Feb. 1962. It is collected in Wodwo, Faber, 1971. pp. 104-46.

12. The Lodger of Ted’s play - saintly, learned, reliant on books and the Law - is an immature “boy”. His double, representing the other extreme of male nature, is Morgan, who is also a potential bridegroom for Elaine. Morgan is cruel, heartless, merciless and loveless. Elaine and The Wife both reveal their Goddess natures through their speeches. For Elaine, “Life has hardly begun” yet she traces her genealogy (like the Virgin Goddess) through the religious persecutions of ages. She is linked with dawn, music, blossoming, the new moon, joy and mercy. She represents one end of the spectrum of Female nature: The Wife represents the other. The Wife is world-weary, her “night lasts forever”, and she traces her history from the serpent which “sang and crawled in a circle” - she is Kali, The Hag with “fangs and a starved length”.

13. Hughes, T. A Dancer to God: Tributes to T.S. Eliot, Faber, 1992. Reprinted in Winter Pollen, pp. 268-92.

14. In his essay on Eliot (WP 274-5), Ted acknowledges the difficulty of accepting such a mythic / occult explanation of physical symptoms in a world which no longer believes in a God-centred universe. He provides an alternative, Freudian, psychological interpretation in which the hidden anima struggles with the ego for release and physical and mental disturbances are the psychosomatic expression of this struggle. At the end of his essay on Coleridge he also notes the value of Erich Neuman’s book The Origin and History of Consciousness (trans. R.F.C. Hull, Princeton / Bollingen, 1954) in any discussion of “the psycho-biological life of individuals” and the “cult of the Female”. (WP 464-5).

15. Almost everything Ted says in this essay on the roots of Leonard Baskin’s work has great relevance to his own work. It was first published as an introduction to The Collected Prints of Leonard Baskin, Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1984. It is republished in Winter Pollen, pp. 84-102.

16. Graves, The White Goddess, p 192.

17. Faas, The Unaccommodated Universe, p 202.

18. Graves, The White Goddess, pp. 69-70. The “alien joker” may also have

remembered that in primitive times only The Goddess's priestesses were allowed to plant or to cook beans.

19. Ibid. p. 395.

20. This is exactly the way Ted describes the Poetic Self as surfacing in the visionary poetry of Eliot and Coleridge. His long essays in *Winter Pollen* on both these poets analyse the ways in which each dealt with these nightmare visions and the myths which they invented in their work to deal them. These essays are very relevant to Ted's own work: "Poets' myths", as he says, "always are (among other things) a projected symbolic self-portrait of the poet's own deepest psychological make-up" (WP 375).

21. Carolyn Wright, *Poetry Review*, Vol 89. No. 3. Autumn 1999. p.8.

22. Interview with Drue Heinze, 'Ted Hughes: The Art of Poetry LXXI', *The Paris Review*, Vol. 37. No. 134. Spring 1995. p. 77.

23. Letter to Aurelia Plath. Jan. 1975. Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, University of Emory, Atlanta. MS 644. SCD Box 18. ff. 10.

24. A copy of proofs for this limited edition is titled *Howls Cries & Whispers*, with 'Howls' hand printed above 'Cries' on the title page; 'Cries' is crossed through with 'Howls' printed above it as the title of the poem on page 7; and *Cries and Whispers* is on the page of publication information. 'Superstitions', the final poem in *Howls and Whispers*, appears with minor differences as 'Capriccios', the first poem in the limited edition, *Capriccio*, of which only fifty copies were issued by Gehenna Press "in the unsettled spring of 1990".

25. The Laburnum, like the Goddess's bean, belongs to the Leguminosae Family It is listed amongst the magical Ogham trees by the Celtic bard, Taliesin, in his poem *Cad Goddeau* (Battle of the Trees) (Matthews, J. *Taliesin: Shamanism and the Bardic Mysteries in Britain and Ireland*, Aquarian Press, London, 1991. p. 298), and is called "the bean" by Robert Graves in his discussion of this poem (WG 32).

26. Anne Stevenson, in *Bitter Fame* describes this episode as occurring between 27 Jan. and 6 Feb. 1961 (BF 205). Ted, in a letter to Stevenson which is quoted by Janet Malcolm in *The Silent Woman* (PanMacmillan, London, 1994. p. 143), wrote: "The truth is that I didn't hold that action against [Sylvia] – then or at any other time... to say that I could not forgive her for ripping up those bits of paper is to misunderstand utterly the stuff of my relationship to her."

27. 'Daddy' (SPCP 222-4), in particular, reads (and was read by Sylvia on the BBC) like a powerful curse. In 'Publishing Sylvia Plath', discussing the first publication of *Ariel*, Ted said: "I would have cut out 'Daddy' if I'd been in time (there are quite a few things more important than giving the world great poems)", but he did not elaborate on his reasons (WP 167).

28. In his letter to Anne Stevenson (ibid.), Ted wrote: "The only thing I found hard to understand was her sudden discovery of our bad moments... as subjects for poemsv. But he wrote, too, "She never did anything that I held against her".

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalJustice cardTeth path
The Path of Justice – Teth

Tarot card 8. Tree path 9.

Joining Sephiroth 4 (Chesed) and 5 (Gevurah).

'Trophies', 'Child's Park', 'Daffodils', 'Night Ride on Ariel'.

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The Path of Justice, like the Path of The Empress (Path 4 - Daleth) which is above it on the Cabbalistic Tree, runs between the Pillar of Justice (Force) and the Pillar of Mercy (Form). It shares the turbulent energies of that earlier path, especially the Goddess energies of Binah (Sephira 3) which are channelled to it via Chesed (Sephira 4). So, the Path of Justice is a path of creation and destruction – of initiation, insemination and gestation. But, because it is lower down the Cabbalistic Tree, its energies are more closely linked to our world and to our individual lives.

The Goddess on this path appears as Themis, the Titan daughter of Uranus (Sky) and Gaea (Earth). Themis was protectress of the infant Zeus, who later relied on her for wise guidance. Her own children governed the seasons, the clouds, wise legislation, justice, peace and fate. She assisted at the difficult birth of the twins, Apollo and Artemis, and made Apollo a gift of the Oracle at Delphi which had belonged to her mother, Gaea. On earth, Themis governs justice, peace and social harmony, and she is shown on the Traditional Tarot card of Justice, card 8, with a sword and balanced scales.

The number for this path is 9, and the Hebrew letter for this path is Teth, meaning

'snake'. Both are closely linked with the Goddess's powers.

Just as Themis, as daughter of Sky (Male) and Earth (Female), embodies all the energies of our world, so 9 includes all the energies of the previous paths ($1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9 = 45$; $4+5 = 9$) and is a number which is said always to return to itself ($9 \times 2 = 18$; $1+8 = 9$; $9 \times 3 = 27$; $2+7 = 9$; etc). It is the number of the Goddess; the number of the orgiastic moon-priestesses who devoured the Dionysian bull; and the number of the Muses who are responsible for all imaginative arts and whose Mysteries of Divine Harmony, inspiration and spiritual rebirth were the foundation of the Orphic teachings of Pythagorus and of the Eleusinian Mysteries associated with Dionysus and Iacchus.

Like its reversed figure, 6, 9 is associated with sex and generation. In the mystical Revelation of St. John the Divine, the number of the Beast, 666, adds up to 91, but so too does the number of the redeemed, 144,0002. Cabbalists, therefore, believe that the powerful sexual energies of 9 may be sublimated (a precise Alchemical term which describes a process of Mercurial purification) by love, judgement and control to achieve the magnificence of enlightenment and Truth. The Cabbalistic meditations for this path are "Act of Power" and "She who rules the Secret Force of the Universe", and the energies of 9 on the Cabbalistic Tree are regarded as the hidden Foundation of all.

Teth, the serpent, also represents fundamental, concealed power. It is Form hidden in Matter; Spirit in Body; the animal energies in the rational human; the Snake in the Garden of Eden. Teth is powerfully sexual and it is both destructive and generative – it devours in order to create anew. It is Good and Evil. It is Nature, the Uroborus, the snake devouring its tail and (like 9) returning always to itself. It is the driving force of life which shapes the pattern of evolution and holds all potential for growth.

'Trophies' (BL 18-19), which is the Birthday Letters poem on the Path of Justice in the Atziluthic World, has "the whiff of the beast" in its lines and in its energies. Its panther is the perfect Dionysian symbol for the energies of this path³ and Ted borrowed it from Sylvia's poem (SPCP 22-3) 'Pursuit', which was written on 27 Feb. 1956 just after their first meeting at the St. Botolph's party. Sylvia described that poem in her journal entry for that day as "a full-page poem about the dark forces of lust... dedicated to Ted Hughes".

Devouring sexual passion is apparent in Sylvia's journal entries for some time before she wrote 'Pursuit'. These earlier entries were partly an expression of emotional turmoil and the conflict between lust and 'nice' behaviour: partly, they were writing exercises. On 18 Feb. 1953, for example, she wrote of a desire to be driven off and raped "in a huge lust like a cave-woman fighting, screaming, biting in a ferocious ecstasy of orgasm... " But she added ironically: "That sounds nice, doesn't it? Really delicate and feminine". However, the "dry pages" to which Ted refers in 'Trophies' are those journal entries based on letters in which Sylvia expressed her passion for Richard Sassoon.

There is a Dionysian quality of ecstasy to the earliest of these letter extracts (SPJ 22

Nov. 1955). But Sylvia's later journal entries, especially that made on 6 March 1956, after her abortive trip to Paris⁴ and after Sassoon's withdrawal from her, contain what Ted describes in 'Trophies' as her "efforts to cry words", her "despair, terror, sheer fury-". Then, on 10 March, the entries show the sudden transference of Sylvia's passion from Sassoon to Ted: "HE is here", she wrote. And in a 'Postscript', "Oh the fury, the fury... The panther wakes and stalks again, and every sound in the house is his tread on the stair".

Throughout Ted's poem, Sylvia is the helpless vehicle for the Dionysian energies embodied in the panther. Sassoon, its "real prey" in the beginning, had "skipped and escaped" so, with a "sudden / Look that locked on" Ted, "through" eyes which are both its own and Sylvia's, it chose its new victim. In Sylvia's journal entries from 10 March to 18 April 1956 and in her poem 'Pursuit' one can still feel the power of those energies, and they did, indeed, bring "a combustion / Of the stuff of judgement" to Ted. So, "with a laugh" and in "drunken euphoria", like a Bacchant, he succumbed to "The tenacity / of the big cat's claim / on the one marked down and disabled" and remained numb to the bloody wounds it had left on Sylvia and to the deadly potential of its power over himself.

The final lines of 'Trophies' sum up the moment at the St. Botolph's party when Ted succumbed to the panther and foolishly tempted Fate by stealing from it Sylvia's hairband and an ear-ring – trophies of war which turned out, in the end, to be valueless objects but which, ironically, became memorials of a situation in which both he and Sylvia were victims (and trophies, perhaps) of the Gods.

Passion and judgement are again the prevailing energies in 'Child's Park' (BL 69-70), the poem on the Path of Teth in the World of Briah.

Child's Memorial Park was close to the Northampton apartment in which Ted and Sylvia were living in July 1958. Sylvia described it as an "odd primitive greening park" (SPJ 6 Sept. 1967) and in her journal entry on 11 June she recorded having written "a good syllabic poem on the Child's Park Stones as juxtaposed to the ephemeral orange & fuchsia azaleas": certainly, the azaleas in her poem⁵ burn like an "orange and fuchsia bonfire" in the dark "leaf-filtered green". In that same journal entry, Sylvia writes of the incident associated with these flowers which is also the subject of Ted's poem. This seemingly trivial incident aroused Sylvia to such fury that she wrote in her journal: "I have a violence in me that is hot as death-blood", and she described how, faced with the momentary defiance of one of the young girls who were stealing rhododendron blossoms, she had to control the urge to "fly at her and tear her to bloody beating bits".

So, as Ted's poem begins by asking, what did azaleas mean to Sylvia that they caused such passion?

Sylvia associates azaleas in her journals and in her poems with roses and, in particular, with the single roses she, herself, had stolen from that same park. She wonders, as Ted does, at her seemingly "split morality": "Here I had an orange and a pink rosebud in my pocket and a full red rose squandering its savours at home & I felt like killing a girl

stealing armfuls of rhododendrons for a dance" (SPJ 11 June 1956). In her poem, 'Fable of the Rhododendron Stealers' (SPCP 103-4), she compares her "nicety" with the girls' "love", her "petty thievery" with their "large", but the excuses she offers there, and in her journal, do not explain the "homicidal" feelings which had gripped her. Clearly, Sylvia's judgement had not been based on understanding and her actions had been an outpouring of some uncontrolled energy within her.

Ted's poem, by using the nuclear imagery of the "Heavy water" needed to quench the "plutonium secret" of Sylvia's rage, suggest similar deep subconscious energies at work within her. And the sexual imagery throughout the poem defines their nature. He shows, too, how these energies might be "cooled and controlled" to produce something new and beautiful rather than something deadly. Sylvia's poem, also makes the link between sensuous, sexual natural energies – the "blowze" and "musk" and soft "nap" of the roses – and poetry "rescued / From blind air, from complete eclipse". She did make poetry from the violence of that incident, but it is as if the effrontery, enormity and casualness of the girls' theft of great bunches of the vivid and fiery flowers swamped her judgement and she failed to remember that lesson in control.

Alchemy picture

Ted's poem repeats and demonstrates that lesson. In it, he performs a poetic / alchemical process in which the fundamental energies of life, the creative powers which are the 'Secret Force of the Universe' and which flowed through Sylvia at the time of the Child's Park incident, are broken down, cleansed and remade. He takes those energies down into the darkness, using the rhythmic beat of "Bullfrogs / Took you down through lily tangle" to take the "brands" of Sylvia's "own burning" passion down into the dark, cooling waters of the pond. Washed free of anger, Sylvia is "resurfaced" to see "afresh" a world of prismatic colour, delicacy, an emergent dragonfly and catalpas with their Dionysian leopard-spotted flowers. The pileated woodpecker⁶ which is fertilizing these flowers is devil-like and snake-like with its "writhing", its "uncoiling head" and its association with "undersides" and with prehistory. All this imagery, coupled with the "livid" cry which "Flung the garden open", suggests a parallel between Child's Park and the Garden of Eden, a parallel which is reinforced by Ted's use of the word "Paradise" just nine words after "garden".

Sylvia, it seems, had already been told that she was "never / More than a step" from Paradise. In the imagery of this poem, nature, hidden in the darkly sexual "pit of the hairy flower", leads Sylvia directly to the core of the Inferno from which, with precise Alchemical imagery, seven steps in a Peacock's Tail of colours lead to a "veil-rending defloration" in the "nuclear core" and "a rebirth out of the sun". This was the sort of Alchemical re-birth which, in the poem, Sylvia "imagined" and she was "fearless" in her quest for poetic rebirth. But the rebirth which eventually occurred and which is described at the end of this poem was disastrous.

In Alchemy, the whole, slow, careful process of purification leads to the 'Conjunctio', 'Coitus', the Chemical Marriage of Male and Female (Sun / King / Father / Abba with Moon / Queen / Mother / Aima) from the nuclear fires of which the pure gold of the Soul

is born. If at any stage of the process the correct procedure is not carefully observed, then the matter being refined will not be pure and the synthesis will fail – often explosively. Ted's use of capitals for the words 'Father' and 'Word' in this poem not only show the God-like status which Sylvia had given to her father but also makes her re-connection with him part of the Alchemical process which she imagined would bring her rebirth. Sylvia certainly believed that her poetic rebirth required her to "get back, back, back" to her father ('Daddy' SPCP 222-4), and to deal with the wounds which his death had caused her. She seems to have been right. But it seems, too, that she did not learn the necessary balance required to channel and control the energies which were released in Ariel.

Ted's choice of 'Child's Park' as a title for this poem on this particular Cabbalistic path, as well as the incident which it describes, aptly convey his own and Sylvia's Cabbalistic (and Alchemical) immaturity at that time. And the poem demonstrates Sylvia's faults on this path, which were the Vice and the Illusion of Chesed: Hypocrisy and the belief of 'Being Right'. This need not have ruined her quest had she learned good judgement and the ability to balance the energies of justice with love. Early in the poem, faced with the uncontrolled energies which fuelled Sylvia's "homicidal hooded stare", Ted intervened. In the end, he did not: could not, because "what happens in the heart simply happens". This line is important. Set on its own in the poem, it conveys an Alchemical and Cabbalistic truth which nuclear science seems to confirm: that the nuclear force which marries or fuses together the nucleons⁷ of two pure atoms is unexplained and uncontrollable. What happens in the nuclear core it seems, as in the heart, just happens.

So Ted "stepped back", and the glare (a deliberately ambiguous word connecting Sylvia's final, fearless 'marriage' to her Father / God with her earlier homicidal stare) produced by the fusion was nuclear and uncontrolled. The "radioactive fallout" of this 'Act of Power' contaminated Sylvia's "whole Eden", which was by then no longer just a child's park, but a family's world.

'Daffodils' (BL 127-9), on the Path of Justice in the World of Yetzirah, is a sad and beautiful poem full of memories and regrets. It is full, too, of the transience of life. Yet, this transience is set amidst the continuity of Nature: the never-ending cycles of death and renewal. Nature – the Uroborus, the snake eating its tail – is the abiding power in this poem.

'Daffodils', in Birthday Letters, is quite different in mood to the poem of the same name and many identical lines in Flowers and Insects (Faber, 1986). Ted, in the Flowers and Insects poem, is the sole flower picker and the mood, to begin with, is jubilant. The massed daffodils are like "a cauldron... boiling gently" in his garden, racing "under every gust of earth-surge" like "blown foam", and providing a stimulus to his own poetic words of wonder. From jubilation, the mood becomes one of piracy and suggestive sexuality, as it does also in the Birthday Letters poem, but the consequences are quite different. In the Flowers and Insects poem, there is more guilt in plucking the flowers than in selling them. They enter Ted's dreams as souls, "Dressed for Heaven", which he has killed and

which have “gone to ground” inside him, where they become “awful”, like accusing “all-seeing angels”. This was a nightmare: it was “Resurrection / The trumpet”, but Ted “wrenched free” of it and “flitted” with his “world”, his “garden” and his flowers. The ending of the poem is hopeful and unstopped both in its sense and in its punctuation which, suitably, is a dash.

In Birthday Letters, ‘Daffodils’ begins and ends with memory: it is all that remains of Sylvia, to whom the poem is addressed. The flowers (as in Flowers and Insects) are unexpected “Treasure trove”, an “incidental gilding of the deeds”, but it is Ted and Sylvia and their small daughter, Frieda, who harvest them, and the words, “we sold them”, end each memory of joy and beauty like a refrain tolling doom. “We sold them”, Ted writes at the beginning of the poem. “It sounds like sacrilege, but we sold them. / Were we so poor?”. This was a question which he did not ask in the Flowers and Insects poem, nor does Old Stoneman the boss-eyed, beetroot-faced grocer appear there. Yet, his appearance on this path of the Serpent is wholly appropriate, for it is he who, devil-like and snake-like, tempts Ted and Sylvia to sell Nature’s “blessing” for profit, playing on their greed and slyly offering them the reasonable excuse that such trade was “A custom of the house”.

Greed is one of the Vices of this path, and other aspects of the poem are appropriate to this path, too. In particular, the phrase “nuptial flight”, which in both poems is associated with “the rarest ephemera / Our own days”⁸, not only evokes the Bee Goddess, Melissa, and the buzzing energy of the bee swarm which precedes the mating of the Queen, but also suggests the Alchemical sublimation (often metaphorically depicted as flight) which leads to the Chemical Marriage. Both associations parallel the Saturnalian deflowering which is most explicit in the Flowers and Insects poem but which survives, fragmentally, in the “soft shrieks”, the “wet shocks” and the girlishness of the flowers in Birthday Letters.

There is no Saturnalia in the Birthday Letters poem and the mood is altogether more sombre. The plucking of the flowers is work to be “bent at”, the “raid” is on Ted’s and Sylvia’s “own good luck”, and the flowers which come as if “falling from heaven” are a “last blessing”. It is interesting, too, that the “deeds” in this poem are not given a capital letter as they are in Flowers and Insects, so they are no longer identified with the Deeds of Ted’s and Sylvia’s Devon property but become also the deeds of two people who were “still nomads – still strangers” to their “whole possession”, a phrase which encompasses material, as well as spiritual and creative, wealth.

Ted’s and Sylvia’s success in selling their manuscripts at that time, in publishing their poems and reviews, and in broadcasting, was also part of their urge “to convert everything to profit”. As Sylvia’s letters to her mother show (e.g. 20 Nov. 1961 and 31 Jan. 1962), they “worked at selling” as much of their work as possible and Sylvia was full of plans to write and sell more. It was not, surely, that Ted believed that their creations should not have been sold: but that money should not have started to become the reason for further creation. Underlying Ted’s horror (in this poem) at their sale of flowers, is the suggestion that he and Sylvia failed to respect the first sign of their own

imaginative potential for the blessing which it was: that they treated the first “flamy” meltings of their own creative ice (which, like the daffodils, were “spasms from the dark earth” born of the Goddess in her Motherly form) as booty and began to prostitute a divine gift. So, they “were overwhelmed”, lost their wedding-present scissors, and could cut off and sell no more frail beauty. In the Cabbalistic context of this particular path, it is not too fanciful to see these scissors as representing (in their looped and crossed shape) the joined, balanced energies of 6 and 9: exactly the necessary unity and balance which needs to exist between earthly and divine energies if the true creative treasure is to be harvested.

Scissors which rust, common-or-garden iron scissors, would not be a common wedding present unless they were silver-plated. Their association with weddings is appropriate on this path, but iron scissors can have many purposes. Iron, because it survives fire and comes from the astral world in the form of meteorites, is a symbol of durability. It is also the metal of which magical weapons are made; it is related to blood by its rust colour; and it provides powerful magical protection against evil and, especially, against witches. In folk-lore, iron scissors may be used as a charm – an iron cross – which is hidden in the birth-bed for protection during childbirth; and scissors are superstitiously associated with both birth (cutting the umbilical cord) and death (cutting the thread of life).

In ‘Daffodils’ in Birthday Letters, the iron scissors are hidden in the birth-bed of the Earth Goddess - the sod from which Nature’s rebirth comes “April by April”. And the scissors belong to Sylvia, linking her to this natural cycle of death and rebirth but also providing a charm, “an anchor”, “a cross of rust”, to ensure the safety and durability of her memory.

In ‘Night-Ride on Ariel’ (BL 174-5), the poem on this path in the dark World of Assiah, all the energies of 9 and of the Goddess are present in the Moon in all her phases. Themis’s scales, here, are unbalanced: her sword is sharp. Wrong paths have been taken and Sylvia’s true self, unearthed from beneath a lifetime’s accretions of experience, childhood learning and social conditioning, was, in the end, not strong enough to withstand the fiery combustion of the Chemical Marriage. So, the Mercurial energies of Ariel, which carry Sylvia into the sun in her own poem of that name (SPCP 239-240) lead, in Ted’s poem, to darkness. The dual, all-or-nothing nature of 8 (the Tarot number of this path) together with the unbalanced energies of 9, on this particular path prove deadly.

Surprisingly, Sylvia’s own poem, ‘Ariel’, fits this path exactly. Ariel was the horse Sylvia rode in Devon and also her poetic genius, and this poem is a superbly achieved poetic description and performance of the nuptial flight which precedes the Chemical Marriage. It brings together matter and spirit, form and force, and turns inspiration into poetry in a poetic / Alchemical sublimation of earthy, sexual life-energies to inspired creativity. The energies begin in “Stasis” then “Pour” through the poem, and Sylvia grows “one” with the Panther, “God’s lioness”, in an unstoppable, “suicidal”, blood streaked flight into that “red / Eye, the cauldron of morning” which is both the sun and the Alchemical cauldron of new beginnings. Both morning (in Sylvia’s poem) and Monday (in Ted’s poem)

represent new beginnings, but in Ted's poem the Moon of Monday is a malign moon – the moon of Selene / Hecate and her dark representatives on earth. The moon which represents 9, the Foundation, is the moon which embodies all history, including personal history, so Sylvia's moon is full of all those women who laid the foundations of her life and from whose influence she could not, in the end, free her true self. They, in the end, are Hecate's demons. So, for Ted, Sylvia's ride on Ariel is a ride into night.

In astrology, the Moon is associated with the spirit and with creativity, but the sun pulls it in one direction and the earth in another. Just so, is a person influenced by the moon in their horoscope: the sun pulls the spirit towards truth and enlightenment but earthy, material energies oppose it. Sylvia's spirit was pulled strongly towards the creative sun and rebirth through the Chemical Marriage but her moon, in the seventh House of her horoscope, made her especially vulnerable to the influence of other people. Several poems in Birthday Letters describe this vulnerability, but Ted specifically links it, in this poem, with Sylvia's moon.

The worldly influences which Ted catalogues in the poem are largely self-explanatory. The women wielding them were Sylvia's Austrian mother, who several times re-made her own life; Olive Higgins Prouty, the fairy-godmother whose money brought Cinderella-like transformations to Sylvia; Ruth Beutscher, the psychologist who treated Sylvia after her suicide attempt; and Mary Ellen Chase who helped Sylvia obtain her teaching position at Smith College. These were the benign new-moons of Sylvia's beginnings: creating her, but creating her as they wished her to be. And Sylvia's relationship with each of them was one of mixed emotions. Love and gratitude towards them frequently pulled against her need for independence, but they were always, in all "phases" of her life, able to tug at her heart. They were very much part of her "dismal-headed" moon of desires and needs which was, as this phrase ambiguously suggests, much peopled and headed towards dismal ends.

Even as Sylvia grew sure of her true self and began to extricate it from the powerful matrix of her learned and conditioned persona, these moon-women were able to manipulate her like an "hour-glass of moonlight" and, finally, to confuse her at the time when she was most vulnerable. Just when she had achieved her goal and her energies were most depleted, they "jammed all her wavelengths" with their "criss-cross instructions" and dragged her back from the sun to her death "That Monday", 11 Feb. 1963. The shred of sun to which she "clung" was, perhaps, the Ariel spirit which she had struggled for so long to release and which spoke clearly in the poems she wrote in her last days. After her death, these poems were all that remained of the "exploded dawn" which ended her nuptial flight into that fiery "cauldron of morning". And her poem, 'Ariel', in which she saw that cauldron so clearly and to which Ted refers in the title of his poem, was, more clearly than any of the other poems, a shred of the sun she had been reaching for throughout her journey.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Bible, The New Testament, Revelation 13:18.

2. Ibid. Revelation 14:1.

3. There are many well-known paintings of Dionusus / Bacchus accompanied by his panthers, e.g. Titian's, 'Bacchus and Ariadne', at the National Gallery in London; and Annibale Caracci's, 'The Triumph of Bacchus', in which the creatures resemble Blake's Tiger. Both these paintings can be found in the Web Gallery of Art

4. Sylvia visited Sassoon in Paris in December 1955, but in March 1956 when she went to Europe again intending to see him, she was unable to find him.

5. 'Child's Park Stones' (SPCP 100-101).

6. The red crest of a Pileated Woodpecker may well have linked it, in Ted's mind, with the Hoopoe of the Sufi fable, The Conference of the Birds. This was a fable which he knew well. In it, the Hoopoe leads the birds to enlightenment.

7. A nucleon is a constituent of the atomic nucleus, i.e. a proton or a neutron.

8. "My own days", in the Flowers and Insects poem.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalHermit cardYod path
The Path of The Hermit – Yod

Tarot card 9. Tree path 10.

Joining Sephiroth 4 (Chesed) and 6 (Tiphereth).

'18 Rugby Street', '9 Willow Street', 'The Afterbirth',
© Ann Skea

Just as the figure of Justice in the traditional Tarot pack represents Themis, the Titan daughter of Uranus and Gaea (Sky and Earth), so the Hermit represents her brother Cronus (or Saturn). Like Themis, he embodies all the energies of the world but, in particular, he is associated with the cycles of Nature and with time – the past, the present and the future. He shares her number, 9, the number of sex and generation.

And the number of his path on the Cabbalistic Tree of Life is 10, which returns all things to harmonious unity.

Cronus, like his father, Uranus, was a sky god who inseminated Earth and was responsible for Nature's continuing abundance. He was also an agent of disorder and change. At his mother's request, he led his brother Titans in war against his aging father, overcame him and castrated him. Then, with his sister, Rhea (also an Earth Goddess) as his consort, he ruled in his father's place until he in turn was deposed by his own son, Zeus.

This myth of the cyclical deposition, emasculation and death of the father (or King) and the subsequent period of chaos and infertility which ensues before the son (or new King) takes his place, has been known in various forms in many agricultural societies. It was a story which was easily associated with the seasonal fertility of the land, and (as Frazer showed in *The Golden Bough*) it often took on magical significance and was ritually acted out to ensure that new growth would take place each Spring. In Ancient Greece, it was the underlying myth of the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries. In Rome (where Cronus was known as Saturn) it was re-enacted each year at the time of the winter solstice in the feast of Saturnalia, after which, for a few days, there was a ritual overturning of the established order – a period of misrule and chaos.

As societies grew more urban and controlled, the festivals began to lose their original magical purpose and Saturn became better known as a god who was responsible for disorder and disaster than for his generative powers. But, like a seed lying dormant during the winter, the hidden creative and generative powers of Cronus-Saturn remained latent and powerful. Both kinds of energy are of importance to astrologers, alchemists and cabbalists when they use Saturn as a symbol.

The planet Saturn, in the art of Alchemy, is the seventh of the heavenly bodies. It is furthest from the sun and represents lead, the darkest and most chaotic of the alchemical metals. In the first Alchemical process, lead (Saturn or 'base matter') must be destroyed in order to release the vital, Divine spark within it: this is metaphorically described as the killing of the old King by his Son. Jung, in his study of Alchemy, likens this period of destruction to descent into the human subconscious; a dark, chaotic state which is nevertheless full of latency and potency. This is a truly Saturnine state.

In the Tarot, The Hermit, is sometimes shown as Saturn in his guise of Old Father Time, leaning with hunched back on the scythe which represents his destructive powers. In traditional packs, however, he is an old, stooped man who holds up a lantern or hides it under his cloak. Symbolically, the Divine Spark is in The Hermit's grasp but it is contained (in the lantern), or hidden in darkness under his cloak, ready for future use. In reality, too, hermits choose to withdraw themselves from the material world and live as close to Nature as possible; and, traditionally, they carry Divine energies which they share with others through inspiring and imaginative teaching or writing.

The Hebrew letter for The Path of The Hermit, is Yod, which means 'Hand'; and the

number of the Path of Yod is 10. Yod, in its very shape, incorporates “the spark of essential good in the letter tet”¹. This is taken to be a hidden sign of God’s latent power in the manifest world.

In Cabbalistic numerology, the number 10 also represents the Divine in the hand of Mankind. It represents the unity of 0 (the Fool; the closed circle which is all and nothing) with 1 (the Divine Spark from which the manifest world began). All earlier numbers, Paths and qualities lead to 10: all later numbers, Paths and qualities are built on it. It is the fundamental formative number; the hidden foundation.

The Cabbalistic meditations for this path are: ‘The Secret Seed of All’; ‘Secret of the Gate of Initiation’; ‘The United’.

In summary, the Path of The Hermit – the Path of Yod (which leads to Tiphereth at the very heart of the Cabbalistic Tree) – is a path on which the traveller will encounter all those destructive and generative energies of Nature which are associated with Cronus-Saturn. On this path, sacrifices are made as the old order is broken down, insemination takes place and a period of gestation begins. Past, present and future; the energies of 7 (Saturn’s alchemical number), 9 and 10; and the energies of 4 (Chesed: the material world) and 6 (Tiphereth: The Way) – all must be encountered on this path before a new birth can occur and bring new order and new creative energies to the traveller’s world.

It can be no accident, surely, that the titles of three of the Birthday Letters poems which belong to this path refer directly to its energies. The first two of these titles reverberate to the energies of 9: ‘18 Rugby Street’ ($1 + 8 = 9$) and ‘9 Willow Street’. The third title refers to birth: ‘The Afterbirth’. And, whilst the title of the fourth poem, ‘Telos’, is less obviously associated with this path, the word’s meaning is specifically ‘Final Cause’, which in Aristotle’s Physics (11.3) is “the end (telos) for which a thing is done”: i.e the purpose (often hidden) which brings about change and motion. For Aristotle, for cabbalists and for alchemists, Nature is the Final Cause of the cycles of life, death and rebirth: Nature, as in the words of one of Ted’s poems, inevitably “pursues her ends” (‘snowdrop’, THCP 40).

‘18 Rugby Street’ (BL 20-24) is the poem on the Hermit’s Path in the Atziluthic World of archetypes. In its first sixteen lines Ted depicts the house itself as an archetypal Tree of Life, its four floors (like the four Cabbalistic Trees) exposed to view like a “stage-set”. In Ted’s picture the “perpetual performance” of human life - the movement up and down the tree on snakes and ladders which are part of both a child’s game and a cabbalists Tree imagery – is a seedy display of mechanical encounters. “Limbs and loves and lives” are tangled and untangled like disordered ropes, rather than being more organically intertwined. And this unending “love-struggle” is ageless, impersonal, acted out by an ever-changing cast of people who, like superstitious actors, tell tales of possession and peddle ancient myths of labyrinths and monsters.

There is a note of irony in Ted’s memory of being told “You should write a book about

this house", for, if 18 Rugby Street represents the Cabbalistic Tree of Life, Birthday Letters is that book. And, indeed, the labyrinth and the "Knossos of coincidence" seem both to have been very real in his and Sylvia's journey around that Tree. No cabbalist or alchemist, however, believes that the labyrinth is inescapable, however "amazed" or en-mazed in the labyrinth of the material world we humans may seem to be. However lost in the darkness the Divine Spirit is within us, they believe that with the right help (such as Theseus had from the Goddess) and with courage and sacrifice, anyone may kill the Minotaur of dark energies within them and escape into the light.

For the moment, however, Ted, in the Tree-house world of '18 Rugby Street' which he draws for us in this poem, is "amazed".

In the second section of the poem (lines 17-49), we see Ted sitting alone, a little hermit-like perhaps, in the middle of the house waiting for Lucas to bring Sylvia to join him. On the floors below him, close to the under-street underworld of the "catacomb basement" and the labyrinthine hell which leads to the "unlovely lavatory", lives a dark, earthy, Belgian girl whose "house-jailor" is a fierce, Cerberus-like dog. Above him, as if still free in the upper branches of this Tree-house, lives another woman, Susan. She too, it seems, will eventually become caught in the labyrinth, will meet the Minotaur and, like the Belgian woman, will die there.

Both women's deaths are linked in this second section of the poem with Sylvia's death² and Ted specifically links all three women numerically by the number of years (seven) between the date of the picture he is describing (1956) and the date of Sylvia's death (1963). Not only does he bring past, present and future together, he also joins the three women with the number of the Goddess (3), and with two numbers which embody completion and change (7 and 10, both of which belong to Saturn). Seven, in particular, is a powerful occult number which is associated not only with the completion of a cycle but also with sacrifice and with bulls³. So, by using these particular numbers in the lines of the poem, Ted ritually links the three women together and associates them with the Athenian maidens sacrificed to the Minotaur at Knossos. And, by the end of this section of the poem, one cycle of life, love and death has been completed.

Appropriately, the first word in the next section (line 50) is 'Lucas', meaning 'light'. After all the deaths, Ted again presses Lucas Myers into service in his role of Mercury, psychopomp⁴, to lead the spirit of Sylvia back into the poem. In 1956, Ted did in fact ask Lucas Myers to bring Sylvia to meet him at 18 Rugby Street. Rather reluctantly, Myers did this, but the date was Friday 23rd March, not Friday 13th April, as Myers confirms in Crow Steered Bergs Appeared⁵, and as several of Sylvia's journal entries also confirm (SPJ Appendix 7: 26 March 1956, "SUNDAY"; 30 March 1956).

Ted himself wrote to Sylvia from 18 Rugby Street on March 30th, 1956, referring to "that night" and to the memory of "getting to know" the smoothness of her body⁶. Yet the date he specifies in the poem as the date for their first sexual encounter was Friday 13th of April. In response to Keith Sagar's query about this confusion of dates he rather vaguely wrote: "You could be right about the dates. Probably I elected this date to

prominence because [Sylvia] made a great point of my doing her father's horoscope "7. He also wrote that the date might have "imposed itself as mighty significant" because of another "truly decisive" Friday 13th in their lives⁸. But whether Ted genuinely made a mistake or not (and it seems unlikely since he refers in the poem to reading the entries Sylvia made in her journal at that time), there are many good Cabbalistic and magical reasons why he might deliberately have chosen to use this particular date at this particular point in the poem.

April (which is ruled by Venus, Goddess of Love) is the month which marks the death of winter and the birth of Spring. It was once the first month of the new year.

The 13th day of April (the ides of April in the old Roman calendar) also marks a calendric period of new beginnings. In the Hebrew alphabet, 13 is the number of the letter representing the Mother of Mysteries and it is associated with death and transfiguration. It represents the death of the old and the birth of the new spiritual self.

Friday (also sacred to Venus) is a day traditionally associated with sacrifice and renewal. In the Bible, for example, it is the day on which Christ died and also the day on which the dead will rise at the Last Judgement.

So, all three elements of this particular date mark an end and a beginning. All three may be lucky or unlucky. All three have occult significance. And Sylvia certainly came to regard Friday 13th April, 1956 (when she met Ted again on her return from Paris) as a day of rebirth. Two years later, on 13 April 1958, she wrote in her journal "TODAY: is an anniversary. Two years ago, on Black Friday the 13th, I took a plane from Rome through the mist-shrouded sky of Europe, to London – renounced Gordon, Sassoon – my old life – & took up Ted and my resurrection came about with that green and incredible Cambridge spring".

April 13th was Sylvia's father's birthday. Before his death he had been Sylvia's "male-ally in the world"(SPJ, 12 Dec. 1958), and in 1956 she was actively seeking a man who could take his place in her life. This was part of the "dream" she "hunted for". But the real "toad-stone in the head of [her] desolation" (and the word 'toad-stone'⁹ suggests the compulsion and ambition which drove her) – the real cause of her "panics" and "fevers" – was all bound up with her need to write. Sylvia's fear was failure and her "worst fear", as she herself said in her journal "would be to live with not writing" (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958). Only through her writing was she able to regain the sunny self she had been before her father died. This was the "life she begged to be given again", and this was the "life she would never recover, ever".

Sylvia had thought that Richard Sassoon might be the man to help her fulfil her needs. By March 1956, however, Richard Sassoon was distancing himself from her, and when she got to Paris he had vanished. Ted, in the poem, refers to Sylvia's journal and the story which it tells of her tears and her turmoil when she discovered that Richard was not in Paris as she had expected. But it tells, too, of the way in which that first sexual liaison with Ted had been fitted into Sylvia's relationships with other men; and of how he

now entered her calculations about her future. A journal fragment written in Paris and dated 1 April 1956 lists, under the sub-heading “Be chaste”, six men Sylvia resolved not to throw herself at, and Ted (whose name is the only one written completely in lower case) is amongst them.

In other journal entries written whilst Sylvia was in Paris, it does indeed appear that Ted was “insurance” (as he puts it) against her fears and panics. Yet both he and Sylvia were equally uncommitted, although both wanted to meet each other again. Ted, in what he describes as an act of “casual self-service”, had “conjured” Sylvia back into his life and was recklessly “Happy to be martyred for folly”: and ‘folly’, here, has the double sense not just of his own foolishness in “bribing Fate” but also of the light-hearted, uncommitted game he thought he was playing.

Androgyn pictureFate, the Goddess, of course answered in her own way with an act of “emergency surgery”, by which she stitched together an archetypal male (full of masculine sexual self-interest) and an archetypal female (using all her feminine wiles in the searching for a suitable mate) to create one whole (but imperfect) being. The image, here, is of the creation of the Alchemical Androgyn, which combines King and Queen, Sun and Moon, and which is an essential precursor to obtaining the pure spiritual gold.

Throughout the poem, time and events are telescoped and Alchemy, Cabbala, and various archetypal myths of death and rebirth are mixed together. So, from the time Lucas is said to be “bringing” Sylvia, the image becomes that of Mercury bringing a weeping Persephone from the land of the dead towards this Alchemical conjunction. Sylvia travels towards Ted through a foreign land in which she is lost, weeping, tortured and powerless. Then, suddenly, the tense shifts and she is present in Ted’s world as he writes the poem: “I can hear you”, he writes, “climbing the bare stairs alive and close”. He hears her breathing, her panting, just as she wants him to, but she is gone from the present as quickly as she came. “That was your artillery, to confuse me”, Ted writes, and he could be referring to both the immediate past as he writes the poem and the distant past, for memory suddenly fails him: “Then – / Blank. How did you enter? What came next?”.

Lucas (Mercury) having performed his task, vanishes. And Sylvia’s spirit suddenly fills the poem like the risen Alchemical phoenix, “a great bird” in a flare of that “cobalt”, electric-blue aura which is associated with spirit. Yet, Ted’s description of Sylvia is as realistic as it is spirit-like. He lovingly describes her “roundy face”, her nose, her lips, her chin, just as if she were present: yet even as he describes it, her face is never fixed, never the same. It is “a prototype face”, primitive, aboriginal, “elvish”, always mobile, “a stage for currents and weathers”. Only in death, Ted writes, does it become fixed, and even then it is child-like, so unmarked by time that its scar looks more like a “Maker’s flaw” than the result of some wound gained later in life¹⁰. Thus Sylvia enters the poem as pure energy; and in spite of Ted’s loving efforts, he cannot pin her down in words any more than he could keep her in his room that day in 1956.

So, Sylvia and Ted walk together to Fetter Lane¹¹. A new section in the poem (line 124)

marks a new beginning and, as if their physical meeting were an explosive prelude to their new relationship, “on a bomb-site becoming a building site” they kiss. And suddenly, they are giddy, falling, as if over the lip of some huge waterfall, clinging together “for safety” as “the roar of soul” sweeps them along. The imagery conveys the maelstrom of feelings which engulf them, but it is also the Alchemical imagery of the fusion of elements in a flask (or “barrel”) from which the soul will be released, and of the “revolving” and “rumbling” of an old order being overturned. This last imagery, together with the mention of Sylvia’s scar and the warning which Ted hears, as if from “a sober star”, are reminders of Saturn’s presence and of the sacrifices associated with his cycles of death and rebirth.

Ted does not ignore this warning. Worse, like the ass-eared Lord of Misrule in this sudden Saturnalian revolution, love overturns reason and he foolishly declares the star to be spiritless and cowardly – a “poltroon of a star”. In this new beginning (another step in the poem (line 136) and in the process being described), Ted is “wrapped” in Sylvia (and the paronomasia, here, with ‘rapt’ and its meaning of being ‘carried away in spirit from the earth, from life, from consciousness, from ordinary thoughts and perceptions’ is beautifully apt). Remembering only the power of their emotions and his own enraptured state, Ted cannot recall how they entered the hotel, only that suddenly “There we were”.

Reading the next line in the poem (line 139), one might think that only a fisherman like Ted could foolishly think that to describe his lover as a fish would be taken as a compliment: but the fish, of course, is the symbol of Aphrodite, of fertility, of Sun-heroes, of Iachus and of rebirth. Sylvia’s fish-like body is “a new world”, the magical but fickle world of Love. And this is now, Ted’s “new world. A poem which he wrote for Sylvia just after this meeting and sent to her in Paris, begins: “Ridiculous to call it love”, but it ends: “Wherever you haunt earth, you are shaped and bright / As the true ghost of my loss”. So, through love, the ‘Conjunctio’, the merging of male and female, body and spirit, is completed.

‘18 Rugby Street’ ends on a euphoric, and possibly foolishly naïve note, with Ted marvelling at his newfound world. But the final line of the poem also encompasses all the possibilities of rebirth and new beginnings which throughout Birthday Letters are associated with “Beautiful, beautiful America”.

Sylvia’s and Ted’s teaching obligations in America ended early in June 1958. They planned to spend the next few months writing but had already saved their round-trip fare to Europe (SPJ 11 June 1958). In the meantime, they found a small apartment in Boston which Sylvia described as “ideal aesthetically if not in high price and kitchen crammed against one wall of the living room”. It consisted of two rooms with a “sixth floor Beacon Hill View to the river” (SPJ 20 June 1958). Its address was 9 Willow Street.

‘9 Willow Street’ (BL 71-4), is the poem on The Hermit’s Path in the World of Briah, which is the mutable, watery world of intellect and abstract creation. For Ted and Sylvia, this address was significant and would have seemed most propitious for the start of their new life of writing, for the Willow tree is a sacred tree, a tree of enchantment and

fertility, which has long been revered by poets¹². The Willow gave its name to Helicon ('willow' = Gk. 'helice'), the abode of the Muses. Orpheus was given his gift of eloquence by touching the Willow in the sacred grove of Persephone and he carried its branches with him in his journey through the underworld. And although it was originally sacred to the sun gods, Beli, Zeus and Apollo, the Willow came to be associated chiefly with the powers of the Moon, with Poseidon, and with Moon Goddesses, Persephone, Hera, Circe and Hecate. Witches used willow for flight, enchantment and divination; and willow wands were used for conjuring dreams, intuition and inspiration. Willow was also associated with death and rebirth, especially at the pagan Willow-Moon Festival of Beltane, when the Wicker Man (or Green George)¹³ was sacrificed to ensure fertility; and at the Summer Solstice when St John's fires (formerly the pagan fires of Oannes/Bacchus) were lit for "lustration" or ritual purification before rebirth.

For all these reasons, Ted and Sylvia would have regarded 9 Willow Street as a "poetic address" and 9, being the fertile number of both Themis and Saturn, would have made it "even better".

Yet even as she found the "ideal" writing environment, Sylvia recognized that she was "Fearful, inadequate desperate", worried about money, about publication, about "sloth, fear, vanity, meekness" but, most of all, about her own capacity for "choosing" and "making" her life. Having been used to the constant demands of school and college, she now swung between "joyous positive and despairing negative" (SPJ 20 June 1958), knowing that she had the free time and the companion she had wished for but afraid that her inner resources would fail her. Words like 'paralysis', 'despair' and 'doldrums' began to occur frequently in her journal. She made lists of things she must do: "produce a book of poems, stories, a novel, learn German & read Shakespeare & Aztec mythology and the origin of the species[sic]" (SPJ 20 June 1958), and she castigated herself if she deviated from her schedule.

These were the "turbines / Home and College had assembled" in her, the external demands which she had internalized and which kept her in perpetual anxiety and motion and "thundered the parquet". The actual move the new apartment lifted her spirits, but "black depression", "fear" and "panic" soon returned (SPJ 14 and 15 Sept. 1958). As she "hammered" at her typewriter trying to create her new self through her writing (Ted's imagery is that of the Alchemical Hermes being reborn from the Philosophical Egg) her "Panic Bird" rarely left her alone; and, in fact, it was her old self – the "old egg" of past experience in which she was still enclosed – which drove her.

Ted, too, was depressed (SPJ 27 Sept. 1958). Unlike Sylvia, who "Perched in the glare" on that "cliff-edge" (which describes both her emotional state and the bright sixth-floor, bay-window at which she wrote) Ted retreated inwards. In the poem he tells us that he shut out the world, the noise and the light, "And sank". In a letter to Lucas Myers from 9 Willow Street, Ted wrote: "My emotional life has been like a dead man's here until very recently"; he also said that there was (in Myers words) "a kind of natural starch in the New England air that gradually encrusted you" (CSBA 90).

In '9 Willow Street', Ted is "enclosed" by "wings of blackness". His "lumber", the dead wood which he carried with him, was not only his own past but also his need to be close to nature, something which he told Lucas Myers was disabled for him by the "chemistry" of American society. And maybe he also had in mind, when he chose the word 'lumber' for this poem, the willow bands with which the sun-god substitute was bound to a stock during the fertility rites of Cybele and Attis¹⁴, a ritual which he made the Reverend Lumb endure at the beginning of Gaudete.

More clearly, this lumber which Ted carried with him to the bottom of the river, is linked in the poem with "Jung's nigredo", the plunge into the darkness and chaos of the human subconscious. In "my black sack" (the personal pronoun confirms that it is Ted alone who is thus encased) Ted strikes "sulphur matches" in an attempt to "find the eyes" of Jung's nigredo, which, for Jung, are "the eyes of the spirit", "the eyes of the understanding and the imagination" (Jung Psychology and Alchemy 250). Sulphur is the purifying element¹⁵ which the Alchemist uses to break down the prima materia – to "Kill the King", and Jung quotes the Alchemists' dictum "Purge the horrible darknesses of our mind" and links these darknesses with the nigredo in which the spirit is fettered¹⁶. It seems, then, that Ted lit his sulphur matches in an attempt to purge himself of the lumber which fettered his spirit. It seems, too, that the sulphur matches which Ted lit were poems.

Most of the poems Ted wrote at this time were published in Lupercal in 1960. Speaking of these poems in an interview with Ekbert Faas in 1977, Ted said that "almost all" of them were "written as invocations to writing" (UU 209). He went on to say that his "main consciousness in those days was that it was impossible to write. So these invocations were just attempts to crack the apparent impossibility of producing anything". Lupercal notably contains poems which turn to Nature to invoke and celebrate the vital spirit. In the first poem, 'Things Present' (L 9) (and the first and last poems in all Ted's books were carefully chosen and had special significance¹⁷), Ted becomes "the tramp¹⁸ in the sodden ditch" in order to "Embody a now, erect a here", as if to create a space in which these poems and his own spirit might live. 'Fourth of July' (NCP 27), however, is an ironic comment on American Independence Day and more clearly describes Ted's perception of America (and of his own situation in America) at that time. In it, nature is "taxed and patrolled", independence is equated with hucksters, "monsters" are banished from "the right maps", and "the mind's wandering elementals / Ousted" from their mythical places of spirit and imagination wait "dully" in an urban world "taking nothing in".

So, suffering from the same sickness of spirit, Ted and Sylvia "huddled" together in Willow Street: he rocking in "infantile" blackness, feeding on her "nightmares and terrors": she "In a paralysis of terror-flutters", in an "airy Hell" in which her writing, which was her ladder to rebirth, was twenty-four hours of toil ("typewriter", "alarm clock" and "new sentence" are run together with beautiful ambiguity) which came from nothing and lead to nothing. In imagery which describes the Alchemical hermaphrodite and the Sulphurous Alchemical process of destruction and purification, Ted depicts the reality of their life at that time and the struggles they endured. Sylvia's journal entries amply

testify to the “siamese-twinning” nature of their relationship, to the walks and the dreams which they shared, and to the “festering” such closeness sometimes fostered in each of them. Yet this “soul sepsis”, this “heaving dimension of chemical horror”, this Alchemical “Killing of the King”, which they shared inside Sylvia’s “Bell Jar”, should have been a step towards rebirth.

Conjunct picture Significantly, their “only escape” was into “arms / That reached upwards or downwards”, which suggests sexual union and is a suitably Saturnian suggestion. But since it was these arms which, Ted says, “rolled us along all night eastward”, these must have been arms other than their own, and Saturn (in the mud below) and the Goddess (in the air above) are subtly invoked. Yet, “what a waste!”. This phrase, which follows immediately in a line on its own, suggests Ted’s later recognition of the mistakes he and Sylvia were making and to which they were “spectre-blinded” at the time. Wrapped in each other as they were, they could not possibly succeed. Each alone might have “met with a new life”, because in Cabbala each must make their own journey in their own way, but together they were “off course” (like the fleeting birds which are associated with happiness in the following lines), being rolled “eastward” rather than westward (the traditional direction for the rebirth of the spirit). And this was not their only mistake.

“Happiness” is set in a line of its own in the text of the poem and is connected to “blown scraps” of vital natural energy in the seven lines which immediately follow. But happiness it seems, like the exotic American birds which briefly visit this poem, was so “momentary” that Ted and Sylvia failed to “identify” it. And the identification of happiness with nature, here, is the key to what Ted and Sylvia failed to recognize. For the Cabbalist and the Alchemist, as Jung points out in the pages where he discusses the purging of the nigredo, the “golden understanding” comes from “the inner light which God has lit in nature and in our hearts from the beginning” (Jung PA 270). Rebirth, in other words, comes from the vital spirit within and is reached through the heart not through the intellect: it is not reached by making schedules and lists or by “hammering” away at anything.

Now, as before on this Path of the Hermit, Ted is given a warning. In an appropriately “dizzy”, dream-like state, Ted encounters an emissary of the Goddess. Writing this poem, he presents his encounter with a bat as a symbolic event, a “scenario” staged by Fate; and, in the penultimate line of the poem, he connects it with the myth he and Sylvia “had sleepwalked into”. Suitably, the Goddess’s emissary in his darkness is a Mercurial shape-changer and trickster - “something” which originally appears to be soft, slug-like and harmless but which turns into a snarling, fanged, hyena-faced Fury.

Bats, in Ancient Greece were sacred to Demeter¹⁹ but more often they were associated with the other bat-winged, bloody-eyed, snake-haired, dog-fanged Furies, the Erinnyes, who were born of Gaea after the blood of Uranus fell on her when Cronus castrated him. The Erinnyes pursued, tormented and drove mad those who shed the blood of family members (“blood shedding its own blood”, as Ted describes this in his version of the Oresteia (O 164))²⁰ but they were persuaded by the Goddess Athena to befriend

Orestes, for which he renamed them 'Eumenides' : the Kindly Ones.

Ted beautifully invokes and contains the tiny bat-Fury in two separate but closely related sections of the poem (lines 73-96). In the second of these, he depicts himself (as at the end of the first poem on this Path) as a fool. There he is, a grown man entertaining a crowd on Boston Common by fighting a tiny bat, and getting bitten for his pains. At the same time, in the poem he is a foolish human attempting to control one of Fate's terrible sisters. But he gave his blood-sacrifice freely and he treated the creature gently and with love: "cradling" it, he "offered it up" to the "wall of chestnut bark" where, "triumphant", it vanished "upwards into where it came from". This bat-Fury sent down from above moves as a bat might - "backwards" and "face-downwards" – but in doing so it effectively turns Ted's world upside-down.

In the final stanza, Ted realizes the true foolishness of his action. American bats sometimes do carry rabies, so he had risked been infected, but he sees his folly also in metaphorical terms. The "tragedy ending" and the "ironic death" "secreted" in Fate's scenario are not his own death from rabies, or Sylvia's death at a later date, but the end of his and Sylvia's joint poetic journey. Ironically, all their shared sacrifices and efforts carried the disease (unidentified by them) from which the enterprise would die, because they were sleepwalking into a flawed myth of their own "spectre-blinded" making. This was the deathly "bat-light" which they "were living in".

Suitably for this Path which is presided over by Saturn, the poem ends with "death": with two deaths, in fact. Ted connects the first death directly with the myth into which he and Sylvia had blindly sleepwalked: he connects the second with the dark, tormented, upside-down world in which they were living. Thus, at the end of this poem, Ted deliberately destroys both these mistakes and in doing so completes a poetic Alchemical and Cabbalistic ritual of purification. In reality, too, Ted's and Sylvia's shared myth did eventually die when Ted gave up the idea of a shared journey and concentrated on helping Sylvia to achieve her goal. Their situation changed, too, when they left Boston to travel around America and then returned to England.

'The Afterbirth' (BL 130-131) is the poem on the Path of the Hermit in the World of Yetzirah. On the surface, this poem describes the birth of Ted's and Sylvia's son, Nicholas, on 17 January 1962. Nicholas was born at Court Green, with Ted and a midwife helping Sylvia with the birth. In a letter to her mother the next day, Sylvia wrote: "at 5 minutes to 12... this great bluish boy shot out onto the bed in a tidal wave of water that drenched all four of us to the skin, howling lustily" (SPLH 18 Jan. 1962); and in a journal entry made at a later date she recorded the delivery of the afterbirth "into a pyrex bowl, which crimsoned with blood" (SPJ 'THE MIDWIFE: WINIFRED DAVIES', entry immediately following 7 May 1962). In a note on Sylvia's poem 'Totem', Ted wrote that the pyrex bowl was "used on different occasions both for her son's afterbirth and the cleaned body of a hare" (SPCP 295).

'The Afterbirth' is clearly rooted in reality, but it also has a complex mythic level which tells of the dream "rubbished"; of the Son-Hero born into a sudden noon-sun-blinded,

“tear-splitting dazzle”; of the Gorgon vanquished; and of Sylvia, at the moment of birth, a triumphant Goddess “laughing and weeping / Into the glare”.

The dream, “the lotus-eater’s whole island”, is not just the placenta which has nourished the baby in the womb, it is also the “dream-land” to which Ted brought Sylvia in ‘Error’ (BL 122), the same dreamland in which they have both been walking as they pursued their shared poetic dream of creative rebirth²¹. This dreamland, now, is “offal”, refuse, waste-stuff lying “rubbished” on “newsprint” which is both “blood-soaked” by the placenta and also, no doubt, by print which reports the usual bloody ills of the real world.

The son who is born is both Nicholas and a “shocking beauty”, “the dazzler”, one who bursts into the room, like Perseus, to confront the Gorgon. Ted sees him “flash-up” the “sunburned German”, but the identity of this German is confused. The lines read as if the child was German, which he was not; or the German seems to refer to someone in a honeymoon memory; or (which is most likely in the Cabbalistic context of this Path) he is Sylvia’s German father – the father who is more often represented as the Minotaur in Birthday Letters but who, here, is The Father killed (flashed-up) by The Son in a “blue-blackish” sunstroke hallucination experienced by Ted.

This last, alchemical, interpretation is supported by the parallel imagery of lines 10 – 12 and 13 – 16, and by the deliberate ambiguities which leave it unclear whether it was the son-hero, bursting into the bedroom “when the Gorgon / Arrived” who ripped off her face or whether the Gorgon herself did this; and whether the son was the sunburned German or whether he destroyed the German; and who exactly slammed down the Medusa-like, placenta-like octopus tripe on Ted’s and Sylvia’s “honeymoon quay” - which may, itself, be part of the “wedding picture” in ‘Error’ (BL 122). Such deliberate turmoil introduces an element of Saturnian and alchemical chaos, just as is found in the cyclical myths of Saturn – Cronus.

The birth in this poem marks a sudden change in the old order of Ted’s and Sylvia’s lives. As in any family, the birth of a child arouses strong feelings of love and jealousy, and family relationships must be readjusted. But the image Ted creates in this poem is also a mythic image in which Sylvia becomes the judgemental Goddess, Athena, helping the sun-hero, Perseus, to finally vanquish her one-time rival, the Gorgon, Medusa. Athena and Medusa were related, Medusa being the deathly Hag aspect of the Triple Goddess²², and a Moon Goddess whose blood, falling on the earth, fertilized it and breed new, serpentine, sexual life. She was, in fact, Nature; and she could be both beautiful and terrifying. Gorgon pictureOvid, in his Metamorphoses, describes Medusa as “a maid far-famed and fair... the jealous hope of suitors”, whose hair “was her charm most rare”. But Poseidon seduced Medusa in Athena’s temple and for this, “lest such sacrilege should no penance earn”, the jealous Athena turned the Gorgon’s hair to “loathsome snakes”²³.

Sylvia, at the time of Nicholas’s birth, displayed many aspects of the Goddess Athena. An undercurrent of judgemental sharpness and jealousy ran through her journal entries

between New Year and 1 May 1962, roused especially by her neighbours' daughter, Nicola Tyrer (SPJ Appendix 15, 1962). In the poems she wrote at that time, she saw mostly blackness, hooks and desolation in nature²⁴; and the moon looms cold but beautiful, as the rival resembling death, and as a merciless thing hissing "snaky acids", which, Medusa-like, petrify "the will"²⁵. There is a sense, too, in which these poems were the afterbirth of Sylvia's completion of *The Bell Jar* on 22 August 1961 (SPJ Note 438).

If, as I am suggesting, Sylvia is meant to be seen as Athena in Ted's poem, and the afterbirth as her Moon Goddess rival, then the hare, too, has double meaning, for the Moon Goddess frequently takes the form of a hare. In the poem, the hare is already "a witchy familiar", a shapeshifter who speaks with a human voice and may hobble "down from under the elms".

The afterbirth in this poem also takes many forms: it is the Gorgon (as it is also in Sylvia's poem 'Medusa', SPCP 224 – 6), sea-tripes, the lotus-eater's island, a "fallen Eden" awaiting rebirth; and, in an ovenproof bowl with "a meaning / All to itself", it is the jugged corpse of the hare – a dismembered Goddess, a totem animal (as it is in Sylvia's poem 'Totem' (SPCP 264-5)) to be eaten in order to embody the Goddess's powers.

Ted, seeing himself as an Egyptian tomb-wall shadow – a dog-headed man like the god Anubis, who conducts the souls of the dead through the Underworld – takes the afterbirth and buries it, significantly, in the earth. This was an ancient folk-practice which was believed to ensure the safety and fertility of the new-born child. Yet, this earth is not just the Court Green garden with its ancient burial mound. Ted describes it in the poem as a "motherly hump" (like a pregnant belly) of "ancient Britain", the land which once belonged to Brigantia, the Celtic Mother Goddess of fertility and of poetry. Years later, Brigantia's powers would be evident in Ted's poetry: in *Remains of Elmet* (Faber, 1979), in particular²⁶, but also in the fertile Devon soil of Moortown Farm and the poems which grew from Ted's involvement there (Moortown, Faber, 1979). The buried afterbirth, it seems, had fruitful results for Ted; and also, in quite a different way, for Sylvia.

Sylvia's relationship to the hare in Ted's poem is complex. She did not share Ted's hunters' view²⁷ of animals like hares, rabbits, grouse and other animals which are hunted and trapped for food: their differing perspectives are made abundantly clear in 'Rabbit Catcher' (BL 144 – 6). But in 'The Afterbirth', the hare is also the Goddess and, therefore, part of Sylvia's own female nature. To refuse and deny and bury that part of herself – the irrational, dark, Moon Goddess part which is closest to Nature – and to allow the judgemental, retributive, Athena-like part of herself to dominate, as she did in *The Bell Jar*, was unbalanced and dangerous. So, the hare opens an accusing eye at her. So, too, it might hobble down "from under the elm", where the afterbirth was buried, to call to her: "Mother! Mother!", as if asking to be acknowledged and rescued, but also claiming a relationship with Sylvia such as a witch's familiar might claim from one who suckled it.

Aurora picture Yet, although it was Sylvia that the hare might call to, Ted imagined it in

“our yard”. He, too, it seems was locking Nature out. And it was he who ran over and killed a hare on the A30 road, thereby locking “error beyond repair”. Significantly, this particular hare (which Ted specifically calls “a witchy familiar”) was “sent”, as if by the Goddess and as if intended to be a sacrifice and a warning; and Ted’s use of the word “error” again refers us back to the poem of that title (BL 122) and, thus, to his and Sylvia’s fragile “wedding picture” dream world.

Sylvia, it seems, did not hear this particular warning. Only when Ted magically “re-formed” the hare on his page 28 in a hieroglyph (the word means, precisely, “a sacred word, a symbol or inscription”: ‘Hieroglyph’ = Gk. ‘sacred, holy’) did she hear its death scream and, when she did, it was unstoppable, like the flow of the heart’s blood from “a burst artery”.

Ted’s use of simile in the final six lines of the poem suggests far more than Sylvia’s reaction to the Goddess’s / hare’s distress. His reference to the telephone which she picks up, “curious”, makes a link with Sylvia’s poem ‘Words heard by accident, over the phone’ (SPCP 202-3) and with the powerful and terrible feelings and events which were precipitated by her subsequent jealousy of Assia Wevill (whose voice she believed she heard). Sylvia’s poem is permeated with imagery of snake and octopus, and of muddy, “fertile”, Saturnian and witchy energy. She writes of “the bowel-pulse” and of a Cronus-like, Hag-like, “lover of digestibles”; and bitter anger pours from the poem as her world is overturned. It is a powerful and agonizing poem, expressing the same terrible and unstoppable emotions as those engendered by Ted’s images of something “moon-eyed” and flower frail being “ripped up” and “disembowelled”.

In the final line of Ted’s poem, the hare / Goddess is alive again and screaming like a Fury. Given the links with Sylvia which have just been made, and the Path on which this poem lies, it is hard not to see the hare / Goddess as having lain hidden within Sylvia until the time was ripe for her rebirth as a dark, destructive and deathly Hag. In Cabalistic terms, too, this would be seen as the result of Sylvia’s denial and suppression of an essential part her spirit – the part which should have balanced Justice with Mercy and Love. This, then, was not the rebirth which Sylvia and Ted had planned or expected. The Hermit’s light, when it was finally revealed, was Divine but vengeful.

In the World of Assiah, far from the Divine Source, all errors are compounded. Assiah is the World of Shells or Qlippoth, the negative energies of the Sephiroth, and ‘Telos’ (BL 176 – 7), the poem on the Hermit’s Path in this World, is full of these energies. In particular, it deals with the Qlippoth of Tiphereth (Sephira 6) and Chesed (Sephira 4), which lie at each end of this Path.

Tiphereth, at the heart of the Tree, is a symbol of “centrality, balance and wholeness”²⁹ and it has special importance for our own consciousness of our outer and inner worlds. Tiphereth, if its power has been used correctly in pursuit of The Great Work, can reveal “the blazing Sun of the Tree”. On the other hand, because its Qlippoth is “Hollowness” and its Illusion is “Identification” (especially an identification of Self based on false beliefs), Tiphereth may reveal “an empty room”.

Chesed's Qlippoth is "Ideology" and its "Vices" are those of "all the other Sephiroth writ large". Used positively, Chesed's energies are creative and expansive - a benign and humble expression of mercy and love, such as a holy hermit might transmit. Used wrongly, to build on and expand a false ideology, Chesed's energies become tyrannous, greedy and selfish. The "Illusion" of Chesed is the illusion of "Being Right", and such arrogance is the direct opposite of the humility needed for the positive expression of Chesed's powers.

The duality of both Tiphereth (the Sun or an empty room) and Chesed (love as merciful or tyrannous) pervades Ted's poem, 'Telos', and the Qlippoth of both these Sephiroth are demonstrated in the picture of Sylvia which Ted conveys. The image of Self which Sylvia projected was one of a capable and confident woman who could set her own goals and achieve them through her own ability, effort and will-power. This was the mask she wore, the identity she adopted. Beneath the mask, however, she feared there was nothing, and it was this fear which caused her panics and depressions. In Cabbalistic terms, Sylvia's reliance on will-power and rational control was a hollow ideology, and under the tyranny of these false beliefs her creative powers became selfish and destructive.

The letter Alpha, one of the many meanings of which is 'the Unchanged Primal Cause' (or, in other words, Telos: the Final Cause, Nature), is the perfect symbol for all this, and, even, for the resulting fall which Sylvia experiences at the end of Ted's poem.

In the poem, and in the world in general, there are "Too many Alphas". Just some of the things listed under 'Alpha' in a dictionary of symbols³⁰ are: an elm, the Trinity, God, New Year and other beginnings, an Ox, an Ibis (Thoth / Anubis), adultery, a favourable judgement, and the Sun. In addition, Robert Graves lists many goddesses who are represented by the letter 'A' ("the birth letter"), most of whom are Mother goddesses and / or Moon goddesses: most, in other words, are aspects of the Triple Goddess. Amongst those listed are Black Annis, a Moon goddess who was "concerned with a May-Eve hare-hunt", and the Goddesses, Athena (WG 369 – 372), both of whom are especially relevant to the poems on this Path.

Ted associates many of these meanings of Alpha with Sylvia in the imagery of 'Telos'. For her, he writes, Alphas were "too many" and "too much". She was "Sunstruck" with Alpha, sick from it. The description, "Eye-sick", suggests sun-sickness but the paronomasia with 'I-sick' also suggests selfishness and self-delusion; and, since Sylvia's eyes were especially remarked on in '18 Rugby Street' and 'The Afterbirth', the image links her again with the Goddess Athena, whose identifying features in Greek poetry were her brilliant eyes and her aegis.

At school, Sylvia was an Alpha (A-Grade) student: but Ted's poem suggests that she gained nothing more from school than good grades and the belief that this was what counted in life. When she "kicked school" – meaning colloquially "left it behind" but, here, physically spurning it too – it "collapsed" in nothing but Alphas (which is, itself, an

ironic comment on the purpose of school).

Sylvia's sickness, a suicidal depression in which she felt "sterile, empty, un-lived, unwise and UNREAD [sic]" was precipitated by "fear of failing to live up to the fast & furious prize-winning pace" of her life up to that time (SPLH 28 Dec. 1953). And the electric shock therapy which Sylvia was given after her suicide attempt, was intended to cure that sickness. In 'Telos' it is possible to read the Alpha "sky-signs" as the "lightning" of shock therapy which went wrong (WP 180) – as, for example, the Jove-like appearance of Johnny Panic in "a nimbus of arc lights" with lightning in "his beard" and "his eye", which Sylvia described in her story of that name³¹ – but there were other more influential Alphas in her sky following her recovery. Important people like Olive Higgins Prouty and Mary Ellen Chase helped Sylvia a great deal by guiding and supporting her plans; and she won many prizes and successes, including acceptance by Cambridge University and the award of a Fulbright Scholarship³².

By 1956, Sylvia had come to regard her recovery from her suicide attempt and depression as a rebirth. She wrote of "waking to a new world, with no name, being born again, and not of woman" (SPJ 26 Feb. 1956). But in her new life she was still, as Ted writes in 'Telos', "covered" (a carefully chosen word) in Alphas: she had "burrowed" into the darkness both literally and metaphorically, and she had turned Aurelia "inside out" with anxiety, but the Self she "came up" with was the same Self, wearing the same Alpha mask, and with the same fears as before.

The phrase, "your mother", also has double meaning. In Sylvia's own poem of rebirth, 'Poem for a Birthday' (SPCP 131 – 137), she makes the same connection between the dark cellar and the earth as is conveyed by the word "burrowed" in 'Telos'. But the earth, there, is also her mother – a devouring mother, who eats her children, as does Nature and as does the dark Hag aspect of the Moon Goddess. So, in both 'Poem for a Birthday' and 'Telos', it was the dark Moon Goddess to whom Sylvia tried to return but who was ultimately rejected for an Athena-like Self after her rebirth. Sylvia, in her own poem, first becomes one with the devouring mother, then banishes her ("Mother keep out of my barnyard"). She swallows time, "the great umbilicus of the sun", and with it she swallows "the endless glitter" which in both poetry and myth belongs to Athena. Finally, she is mechanically re-made in "a city of spare parts". In reality, as in 'Telos', Sylvia's return to mother earth, when she buried herself in the cellar intending to die, was abruptly reversed: the mother was turned inside-out and the darkness became buried within Sylvia, not she in it. In the imagery of Sylvia's poem, and in the re-making of herself which the writing of the poem imaginatively re-enacted, "the vase, reconstructed, houses / the elusive rose" or, put another way, it is the shadowy aspect of Love which lies cupped in the hand-made bowl and which is as important as the visible aspect. Sylvia acknowledged, there, the existence of both.

The simile which Ted uses in 'Telos' to describe this turning inside-out of "your mother" is not, on the face of it, very apt but it, too, conveys the dual aspect of Love. A feather pillow is soft and comforting, not qualities usually associated with Sylvia's mother, Aurelia, by either Sylvia or Ted. Real as Aurelia's love for Sylvia was, it seems generally

to have been expressed in a practical, efficient, matter-of-fact way – rather as one might expect the Goddess Athena's love to be, for Athena was also the fierce protectress of mothers and their children. The soft, feathery, ecstatic, floating kind of love, however, is associated with the Moon Goddess (as Diana rather than Hecate) and if you rip up a feather pillow the result is a cloud of feathers which resemble soft, drifting flakes of snow. Perhaps it is stretching the imagination too far to link this image to the snow out of which the hare / Goddess pleads in 'The Afterbirth', but the meaning is the same: something soft and gentle has been ripped up, turned out, rejected.

Other images which Ted chooses in 'Telos' to describe Sylvia's life after that first rebirth all demonstrate the Alpha nature of her new Self and the self-destructive and Athena-like aspects of her search for love. Rumpelstiltskin, in the Grimm brothers' story, stamped so hard that he destroyed himself. Sylvia, in Birthday Letters, finally achieves union with her Minotaur father, but it destroys her; and in real life she was united with him only through death. In her poetry, Sylvia reached her father through her Ariel (another Alpha) voice and her love turned to anger, but it was these angry poems which were most applauded by other women (who often did behave like a "whole band" of destructive Alpha goddesses). Sylvia's search for love, too, was rational and will-driven – like a fairground game at which she was expert. All her boyfriends were Alpha males, "a straight row of Alphas", and she shot them down just like that. Her "prize" in this love game was the reinforcement of the image she chose to project of an Alpha "doll" – blonde, pretty and desirable.

That doll persona was "plastic" (malleable but artificial and hollow) and Sylvia smashed it, Ted says, "with a kitchen stool" – an image and a meaning which he used earlier in Birthday Letters in 'The Minotaur' (BL 120). In that moment of uncontrolled anger, Sylvia found a new, "tick-tock Alpha" beginning and (as discussed in The Path of the Emperor) the energy which fuelled her Ariel voice but which led her, too, to the Minotaur and to disaster. In 'Telos', that same moment of uncontrolled anger is the culmination of a sequence of angry, calculated and vengeful acts. But in destroying the "doll", Sylvia also wounded herself and it was her own blood which "signed" the urban "snowscape" through which she then ran. This bloody signature suggests the anguish which Sylvia later bled into her Ariel poems, but the fact that in 'Telos' the blood came from her "escaping heel" is also significant.

In myth, the heel was the only vulnerable part of a Sun-hero's body. Often it was the dark Love Goddess or the Hag who inflicted the wound or caused it to be inflicted³³, and such a wound was always fatal. It is appropriate, then, that Sylvia, as an embodiment of the wrathful Athena (whose father was a Sun god) should display the bloodied heel of a wounded sun-hero. And her flight, too, is shown as a desperate attempt, "Anyhow" (the word stands alone, suggesting the most desperate of measures), to escape from "The Furies of Alpha" which belong, as in the other poems on this path, to the Moon Goddess / Hag.

In Cabbalistic terms, Sylvia "hurdled every letter of the Alphabet", rather than working carefully along each Path and learning as she went. So, she "hurled" herself "beyond

Omega”, the end which should have brought enlightenment and completion. The final image of the poem is confusing, but it can be understood in Cabbalistic terms, because the shape of the Hebrew letter Aleph (Alpha) is formed by two Yods (the letter of this Path), one above and one below a diagonal line: symbolically, this shows that the Divine Spark (from which everything in our world began) exists both above and below the firmament of our material world. Above is the universe of the “higher water”, a place of blazing sun in which the Soul will find joy: below is the cold, glittering universe of the “lower water” in which the Soul will find only bitterness. Each is a universe of Alpha; and Sylvia “fell” into the “glittering”, lower waters of the two.

‘Telos’ encompasses Saturn as Father Time and it follows Sylvia’s life from beginning to end, twice overturning her world with a form of death and rebirth. But the lessons of Cabbala were not learned and each new Self embodied the same mistaken ideology. Inevitably, this led to disaster and Telos / Nature is shown as the Final Cause of this. Having remained hidden, like the Hermit’s light, Nature finally achieved her ends and her power was acknowledged, but only in the darkest possible way.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Mystical Significance of Hebrew Letters (Yod)
2. Throughout Birthday Letters, Sylvia’s father is associated with the labyrinth and the Minotaur. Also, with Saturn-Cronus as the presiding figure in this poem, it is notable that on 29 March 1959 (SPJ) Sylvia recorded in her journal that in a psychotherapy session with Ruth Beuscher she had explored the (presumably subconscious) belief that she might have killed and castrated her father.
3. In the Bible, for example, see Leviticus 4:1-6; and Numbers 23 (where sacrifice is also associated with magical practices). The number 7 was also associated with sacrifice and bulls in many ancient spiritual-rebirth cults, such as the Mysteries of Mithra, which Joseph Campbell discusses at length in *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*, Ch. 6:III.
4. As discussed in earlier chapters, Lucas Myers served this same guiding, Mercurial purpose in both ‘Visit’ and ‘St Botolphs’.
5. Chapter 11 of *Crow Steered Bergs Appeared* describes the “historical details” which lie behind Ted’s poem. Lucas Myers writes that Ted asked him (in a letter dated 18 March 1956) “to do an errand I didn’t want to do” but he did agree to meet Sylvia in London and on March 23 he did escort her to the flat in Rugby Street where Ted was living.
6. This letter is amongst the Sylvia Plath papers held at the Lilly Library, Indiana University. (Plath mss. II, Correspondence, Box 6/6 (+1), 1956 Mar.-Apr.)
7. Hughes/Sagar correspondence. British Library, Dep. 10003(10). 15th August 1997.

8. On April 13th 1957 (SPLH), Sylvia wrote to her mother recording “Our first real professional “British” acceptance”. The Atlantic Monthly had accepted two of her poems: ‘Spinster’ and ‘Black Rook in Rainy Weather’; and one of Ted’s: ‘Famous Poet’, a choice which Ted would have regarded as auspicious.

9. Toad-stones (so called because they are said to come from the body of a toad) are magical stones which witches used to help people achieve their goals. But in Hans Christian Anderson’s parable, *The Toad*, the stone, or jewel, in the head of the toad is the spark of sun which causes “continual striving and the desire to go upward - ever upward”. So, the ugliest toad may be driven to journey from the dark, sunless well into the light, and the spark will return to the sun. Sylvia knew Anderson’s stories well (see SPJ, 4 Jan. 1958, for example).

10. Even in photographs, Sylvia’s image seems curiously unfixed. Apart from the few iconic photographs which are seen so often that she is instantly identified, many look as if they are of different people. Compare photographs 3, 12, 15 and 20, in *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, for example.

11. Fetter Lane is in the City of London and, as Peter Ackroyd notes in *London: The Biography* (Random House, 2000. pp. 229-237), it has always been a boundary, an edge. This is appropriate for Ted’s and Sylvia’s plunge into a “Niagara” of shared emotions. Appropriate, too, for a couple about to become united, is the more common meaning of ‘fetter’ (to bind or shackle). If Fetter Lane was the true location of Sylvia’s London hotel, then the name was another coincidence in their lives.

12. Robert Graves has much to say about the Willow in *The White Goddess*, especially in Chapter 10, ‘The Tree Alphabet’.

13. Caesar described the wicker figures of gods made by Druids in Britain and claimed that human sacrifices were burned in them. Frazer describes vegetative Green George ceremonies in Europe in which the Willow was ritually cut down and its branches used to clothe a figure used in mock sacrifice to ensure the fertility of the land and waters. He describes old and sick people spitting three times on the cut willow and saying: “You will soon die, but let us live” (Frazer, GB 166-7).

14. See Frazer: ‘The Myth and Ritual of Attis’, *The Golden Bough*, Ch. XXXIV.

15. Sulphur has long been used in medicine for cleansing and purifying purposes and was once commonly used to sterilize sickrooms after infectious diseases such as diphtheria.

16. “the “darknesses of our mind” coincides unmistakably with the nigredo” (Jung PA 271).

17. This poem is not included in *New Selected Poems*, possibly because it had served a

special purpose in Lupercal and that purpose was not relevant to the more diverse collection of poems.

18. Tramps, in Ted's poems, are another kind of hermit, living close to nature and keeping the vital energies intact.

19. The Earth Goddess, Demeter, took the form of a horse in order to escape Poseidon (Saturn) who was pursuing her, but he changed into a stallion and raped her. She was so infuriated by this that she took on the aspect of a Fury and hid in a cave. In 'Autumn Nature Notes' in Season Songs, Ted invented his own myth for the Horse-chestnut tree, associating it with the "swirly grain" belonging to the Earth Goddess, and describing it as a "plump mare" which bears the dragon-slaying hero towards his "sunbeam princess" (SS 46-7).

20. Orestes, having killed his father, was pursued by the Erinnyes but at his trial Athena intervened on his behalf and he was acquitted. The Erinnyes challenged this judgement, threatening to make the earth barren with spilled blood, but Athena made a pact with them. She promised them that if they lived in her sanctuary in Athens, she would ensure that all would pay tribute to them. In return they must bless the land and ensure fertility. Because they agreed to this, Orestes renamed them 'Eumenides', the Kindly Ones. Ted's version of Aeschelus's Oresteia ends with this story.

21. The lotus is a common symbol of rebirth.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalHermit cardYod path
The Path of The Hermit – Yod

Tarot card 9. Tree path 10.

Joining Sephiroth 4 (Chesed) and 6 (Tiphereth).

'18 Rugby Street', '9 Willow Street', 'The Afterbirth',
© Ann Skea

Just as the figure of Justice in the traditional Tarot pack represents Themis, the Titan

daughter of Uranus and Gaea (Sky and Earth), so the Hermit represents her brother Cronus (or Saturn). Like Themis, he embodies all the energies of the world but, in particular, he is associated with the cycles of Nature and with time – the past, the present and the future. He shares her number, 9, the number of sex and generation. And the number of his path on the Cabbalistic Tree of Life is 10, which returns all things to harmonious unity.

Cronus, like his father, Uranus, was a sky god who inseminated Earth and was responsible for Nature's continuing abundance. He was also an agent of disorder and change. At his mother's request, he led his brother Titans in war against his aging father, overcame him and castrated him. Then, with his sister, Rhea (also an Earth Goddess) as his consort, he ruled in his father's place until he in turn was deposed by his own son, Zeus.

This myth of the cyclical deposition, emasculation and death of the father (or King) and the subsequent period of chaos and infertility which ensues before the son (or new King) takes his place, has been known in various forms in many agricultural societies. It was a story which was easily associated with the seasonal fertility of the land, and (as Frazer showed in *The Golden Bough*) it often took on magical significance and was ritually acted out to ensure that new growth would take place each Spring. In Ancient Greece, it was the underlying myth of the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries. In Rome (where Cronus was known as Saturn) it was re-enacted each year at the time of the winter solstice in the feast of Saturnalia, after which, for a few days, there was a ritual overturning of the established order – a period of misrule and chaos.

As societies grew more urban and controlled, the festivals began to lose their original magical purpose and Saturn became better known as a god who was responsible for disorder and disaster than for his generative powers. But, like a seed lying dormant during the winter, the hidden creative and generative powers of Cronus-Saturn remained latent and powerful. Both kinds of energy are of importance to astrologers, alchemists and cabbalists when they use Saturn as a symbol.

The planet Saturn, in the art of Alchemy, is the seventh of the heavenly bodies. It is furthest from the sun and represents lead, the darkest and most chaotic of the alchemical metals. In the first Alchemical process, lead (Saturn or 'base matter') must be destroyed in order to release the vital, Divine spark within it: this is metaphorically described as the killing of the old King by his Son. Jung, in his study of Alchemy, likens this period of destruction to descent into the human subconscious; a dark, chaotic state which is nevertheless full of latency and potency. This is a truly Saturnine state.

In the Tarot, The Hermit, is sometimes shown as Saturn in his guise of Old Father Time, leaning with hunched back on the scythe which represents his destructive powers. In traditional packs, however, he is an old, stooped man who holds up a lantern or hides it under his cloak. Symbolically, the Divine Spark is in The Hermit's grasp but it is contained (in the lantern), or hidden in darkness under his cloak, ready for future use. In reality, too, hermits choose to withdraw themselves from the material world and live as

close to Nature as possible; and, traditionally, they carry Divine energies which they share with others through inspiring and imaginative teaching or writing.

The Hebrew letter for The Path of The Hermit, is Yod, which means 'Hand'; and the number of the Path of Yod is 10. Yod, in its very shape, incorporates "the spark of essential good in the letter tet"¹. This is taken to be a hidden sign of God's latent power in the manifest world.

In Cabbalistic numerology, the number 10 also represents the Divine in the hand of Mankind. It represents the unity of 0 (the Fool; the closed circle which is all and nothing) with 1 (the Divine Spark from which the manifest world began). All earlier numbers, Paths and qualities lead to 10: all later numbers, Paths and qualities are built on it. It is the fundamental formative number; the hidden foundation.

The Cabbalistic meditations for this path are: 'The Secret Seed of All'; 'Secret of the Gate of Initiation'; 'The United'.

In summary, the Path of The Hermit – the Path of Yod (which leads to Tiphereth at the very heart of the Cabbalistic Tree) – is a path on which the traveller will encounter all those destructive and generative energies of Nature which are associated with Cronus-Saturn. On this path, sacrifices are made as the old order is broken down, insemination takes place and a period of gestation begins. Past, present and future; the energies of 7 (Saturn's alchemical number), 9 and 10; and the energies of 4 (Chesed: the material world) and 6 (Tiphereth: The Way) – all must be encountered on this path before a new birth can occur and bring new order and new creative energies to the traveller's world.

It can be no accident, surely, that the titles of three of the Birthday Letters poems which belong to this path refer directly to its energies. The first two of these titles reverberate to the energies of 9: '18 Rugby Street' ($1 + 8 = 9$) and '9 Willow Street'. The third title refers to birth: 'The Afterbirth'. And, whilst the title of the fourth poem, 'Telos', is less obviously associated with this path, the word's meaning is specifically 'Final Cause', which in Aristotle's *Physics* (11.3) is "the end (telos) for which a thing is done": i.e the purpose (often hidden) which brings about change and motion. For Aristotle, for cabbalists and for alchemists, Nature is the Final Cause of the cycles of life, death and rebirth: Nature, as in the words of one of Ted's poems, inevitably "pursues her ends" ('snowdrop', THCP 40).

'18 Rugby Street' (BL 20-24) is the poem on the Hermit's Path in the Atziluthic World of archetypes. In its first sixteen lines Ted depicts the house itself as an archetypal Tree of Life, its four floors (like the four Cabbalistic Trees) exposed to view like a "stage-set". In Ted's picture the "perpetual performance" of human life - the movement up and down the tree on snakes and ladders which are part of both a child's game and a cabbalists Tree imagery – is a seedy display of mechanical encounters. "Limbs and loves and lives" are tangled and untangled like disordered ropes, rather than being more organically intertwined. And this unending "love-struggle" is ageless, impersonal, acted

out by an ever-changing cast of people who, like superstitious actors, tell tales of possession and peddle ancient myths of labyrinths and monsters.

There is a note of irony in Ted's memory of being told "You should write a book about this house", for, if 18 Rugby Street represents the Cabbalistic Tree of Life, Birthday Letters is that book. And, indeed, the labyrinth and the "Knossos of coincidence" seem both to have been very real in his and Sylvia's journey around that Tree. No cabbalist or alchemist, however, believes that the labyrinth is inescapable, however "amazed" or en-mazed in the labyrinth of the material world we humans may seem to be. However lost in the darkness the Divine Spirit is within us, they believe that with the right help (such as Theseus had from the Goddess) and with courage and sacrifice, anyone may kill the Minotaur of dark energies within them and escape into the light.

For the moment, however, Ted, in the Tree-house world of '18 Rugby Street' which he draws for us in this poem, is "amazed".

In the second section of the poem (lines 17-49), we see Ted sitting alone, a little hermit-like perhaps, in the middle of the house waiting for Lucas to bring Sylvia to join him. On the floors below him, close to the under-street underworld of the "catacomb basement" and the labyrinthine hell which leads to the "unlovely lavatory", lives a dark, earthy, Belgian girl whose "house-jailor" is a fierce, Cerberus-like dog. Above him, as if still free in the upper branches of this Tree-house, lives another woman, Susan. She too, it seems, will eventually become caught in the labyrinth, will meet the Minotaur and, like the Belgian woman, will die there.

Both women's deaths are linked in this second section of the poem with Sylvia's death² and Ted specifically links all three women numerically by the number of years (seven) between the date of the picture he is describing (1956) and the date of Sylvia's death (1963). Not only does he bring past, present and future together, he also joins the three women with the number of the Goddess (3), and with two numbers which embody completion and change (7 and 10, both of which belong to Saturn). Seven, in particular, is a powerful occult number which is associated not only with the completion of a cycle but also with sacrifice and with bulls³. So, by using these particular numbers in the lines of the poem, Ted ritually links the three women together and associates them with the Athenian maidens sacrificed to the Minotaur at Knossos. And, by the end of this section of the poem, one cycle of life, love and death has been completed.

Appropriately, the first word in the next section (line 50) is 'Lucas', meaning 'light'. After all the deaths, Ted again presses Lucas Myers into service in his role of Mercury, psychopomp⁴, to lead the spirit of Sylvia back into the poem. In 1956, Ted did in fact ask Lucas Myers to bring Sylvia to meet him at 18 Rugby Street. Rather reluctantly, Myers did this, but the date was Friday 23rd March, not Friday 13th April, as Myers confirms in *Crow Steered Bergs Appeared*⁵, and as several of Sylvia's journal entries also confirm (SPJ Appendix 7: 26 March 1956, "SUNDAY"; 30 March 1956).

Ted himself wrote to Sylvia from 18 Rugby Street on March 30th, 1956, referring to "that

night” and to the memory of “getting to know” the smoothness of her body⁶. Yet the date he specifies in the poem as the date for their first sexual encounter was Friday 13th of April. In response to Keith Sagar’s query about this confusion of dates he rather vaguely wrote: “You could be right about the dates. Probably I elected this date to prominence because [Sylvia] made a great point of my doing her father’s horoscope ”⁷. He also wrote that the date might have “imposed itself as mighty significant” because of another “truly decisive” Friday 13th in their lives⁸. But whether Ted genuinely made a mistake or not (and it seems unlikely since he refers in the poem to reading the entries Sylvia made in her journal at that time), there are many good Cabbalistic and magical reasons why he might deliberately have chosen to use this particular date at this particular point in the poem.

April (which is ruled by Venus, Goddess of Love) is the month which marks the death of winter and the birth of Spring. It was once the first month of the new year.

The 13th day of April (the ides of April in the old Roman calendar) also marks a calendric period of new beginnings. In the Hebrew alphabet, 13 is the number of the letter representing the Mother of Mysteries and it is associated with death and transfiguration. It represents the death of the old and the birth of the new spiritual self.

Friday (also sacred to Venus) is a day traditionally associated with sacrifice and renewal. In the Bible, for example, it is the day on which Christ died and also the day on which the dead will rise at the Last Judgement.

So, all three elements of this particular date mark an end and a beginning. All three may be lucky or unlucky. All three have occult significance. And Sylvia certainly came to regard Friday 13th April, 1956 (when she met Ted again on her return from Paris) as a day of rebirth. Two years later, on 13 April 1958, she wrote in her journal “TODAY: is an anniversary. Two years ago, on Black Friday the 13th, I took a plane from Rome through the mist-shrouded sky of Europe, to London – renounced Gordon, Sassoon – my old life – & took up Ted and my resurrection came about with that green and incredible Cambridge spring”.

April 13th was Sylvia’s father’s birthday. Before his death he had been Sylvia’s “male-ally in the world”(SPJ, 12 Dec. 1958), and in 1956 she was actively seeking a man who could take his place in her life. This was part of the “dream” she “hunted for”. But the real “toad-stone in the head of [her] desolation” (and the word ‘toad-stone’⁹ suggests the compulsion and ambition which drove her) – the real cause of her “panics” and “fevers” – was all bound up with her need to write. Sylvia’s fear was failure and her “worst fear”, as she herself said in her journal “would be to live with not writing” (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958). Only through her writing was she able to regain the sunny self she had been before her father died. This was the “life she begged to be given again”, and this was the “life she would never recover, ever”.

Sylvia had thought that Richard Sassoon might be the man to help her fulfil her needs. By March 1956, however, Richard Sassoon was distancing himself from her, and when

she got to Paris he had vanished. Ted, in the poem, refers to Sylvia's journal and the story which it tells of her tears and her turmoil when she discovered that Richard was not in Paris as she had expected. But it tells, too, of the way in which that first sexual liaison with Ted had been fitted into Sylvia's relationships with other men; and of how he now entered her calculations about her future. A journal fragment written in Paris and dated 1 April 1956 lists, under the sub-heading "Be chaste", six men Sylvia resolved not to throw herself at, and Ted (whose name is the only one written completely in lower case) is amongst them.

In other journal entries written whilst Sylvia was in Paris, it does indeed appear that Ted was "insurance" (as he puts it) against her fears and panics. Yet both he and Sylvia were equally uncommitted, although both wanted to meet each other again. Ted, in what he describes as an act of "casual self-service", had "conjured" Sylvia back into his life and was recklessly "Happy to be martyred for folly": and 'folly', here, has the double sense not just of his own foolishness in "bribing Fate" but also of the light-hearted, uncommitted game he thought he was playing.

Androgyn pictureFate, the Goddess, of course answered in her own way with an act of "emergency surgery", by which she stitched together an archetypal male (full of masculine sexual self-interest) and an archetypal female (using all her feminine wiles in the searching for a suitable mate) to create one whole (but imperfect) being. The image, here, is of the creation of the Alchemical Androgyn, which combines King and Queen, Sun and Moon, and which is an essential precursor to obtaining the pure spiritual gold.

Throughout the poem, time and events are telescoped and Alchemy, Cabbala, and various archetypal myths of death and rebirth are mixed together. So, from the time Lucas is said to be "bringing" Sylvia, the image becomes that of Mercury bringing a weeping Persephone from the land of the dead towards this Alchemical conjunction. Sylvia travels towards Ted through a foreign land in which she is lost, weeping, tortured and powerless. Then, suddenly, the tense shifts and she is present in Ted's world as he writes the poem: "I can hear you", he writes, "climbing the bare stairs alive and close". He hears her breathing, her panting, just as she wants him to, but she is gone from the present as quickly as she came. "That was your artillery, to confuse me", Ted writes, and he could be referring to both the immediate past as he writes the poem and the distant past, for memory suddenly fails him: "Then – / Blank. How did you enter? What came next?".

Lucas (Mercury) having performed his task, vanishes. And Sylvia's spirit suddenly fills the poem like the risen Alchemical phoenix, "a great bird" in a flare of that "cobalt", electric-blue aura which is associated with spirit. Yet, Ted's description of Sylvia is as realistic as it is spirit-like. He lovingly describes her "roundy face", her nose, her lips, her chin, just as if she were present: yet even as he describes it, her face is never fixed, never the same. It is "a prototype face", primitive, aboriginal, "elvish", always mobile, "a stage for currents and weathers". Only in death, Ted writes, does it become fixed, and even then it is child-like, so unmarked by time that its scar looks more like a "Maker's flaw" than the result of some wound gained later in life¹⁰. Thus Sylvia enters the poem

as pure energy; and in spite of Ted's loving efforts, he cannot pin her down in words any more than he could keep her in his room that day in 1956.

So, Sylvia and Ted walk together to Fetter Lane¹¹. A new section in the poem (line 124) marks a new beginning and, as if their physical meeting were an explosive prelude to their new relationship, "on a bomb-site becoming a building site" they kiss. And suddenly, they are giddy, falling, as if over the lip of some huge waterfall, clinging together "for safety" as "the roar of soul" sweeps them along. The imagery conveys the maelstrom of feelings which engulf them, but it is also the Alchemical imagery of the fusion of elements in a flask (or "barrel") from which the soul will be released, and of the "revolving" and "rumbling" of an old order being overturned. This last imagery, together with the mention of Sylvia's scar and the warning which Ted hears, as if from "a sober star", are reminders of Saturn's presence and of the sacrifices associated with his cycles of death and rebirth.

Ted does not ignore this warning. Worse, like the ass-eared Lord of Misrule in this sudden Saturnalian revolution, love overturns reason and he foolishly declares the star to be spiritless and cowardly – a "poltroon of a star". In this new beginning (another step in the poem (line 136) and in the process being described), Ted is "wrapped" in Sylvia (and the paronomasia, here, with 'rapt' and its meaning of being 'carried away in spirit from the earth, from life, from consciousness, from ordinary thoughts and perceptions' is beautifully apt). Remembering only the power of their emotions and his own enraptured state, Ted cannot recall how they entered the hotel, only that suddenly "There we were".

Reading the next line in the poem (line 139), one might think that only a fisherman like Ted could foolishly think that to describe his lover as a fish would be taken as a compliment: but the fish, of course, is the symbol of Aphrodite, of fertility, of Sun-heroes, of Iachus and of rebirth. Sylvia's fish-like body is "a new world", the magical but fickle world of Love. And this is now, Ted's "new world. A poem which he wrote for Sylvia just after this meeting and sent to her in Paris, begins: "Ridiculous to call it love", but it ends: "Wherever you haunt earth, you are shaped and bright / As the true ghost of my loss". So, through love, the 'Conjunctio', the merging of male and female, body and spirit, is completed.

'18 Rugby Street' ends on a euphoric, and possibly foolishly naïve note, with Ted marvelling at his newfound world. But the final line of the poem also encompasses all the possibilities of rebirth and new beginnings which throughout Birthday Letters are associated with "Beautiful, beautiful America".

Sylvia's and Ted's teaching obligations in America ended early in June 1958. They planned to spend the next few months writing but had already saved their round-trip fare to Europe (SPJ 11 June 1958). In the meantime, they found a small apartment in Boston which Sylvia described as "ideal aesthetically if not in high price and kitchen crammed against one wall of the living room". It consisted of two rooms with a "sixth floor Beacon Hill View to the river" (SPJ 20 June 1958). Its address was 9 Willow Street.

'9 Willow Street' (BL 71-4), is the poem on The Hermit's Path in the World of Briah, which is the mutable, watery world of intellect and abstract creation. For Ted and Sylvia, this address was significant and would have seemed most propitious for the start of their new life of writing, for the Willow tree is a sacred tree, a tree of enchantment and fertility, which has long been revered by poets¹². The Willow gave its name to Helicon ('willow' = Gk. 'helice'), the abode of the Muses. Orpheus was given his gift of eloquence by touching the Willow in the sacred grove of Persephone and he carried its branches with him in his journey through the underworld. And although it was originally sacred to the sun gods, Beli, Zeus and Apollo, the Willow came to be associated chiefly with the powers of the Moon, with Poseidon, and with Moon Goddesses, Persephone, Hera, Circe and Hecate. Witches used willow for flight, enchantment and divination; and willow wands were used for conjuring dreams, intuition and inspiration. Willow was also associated with death and rebirth, especially at the pagan Willow-Moon Festival of Beltane, when the Wicker Man (or Green George)¹³ was sacrificed to ensure fertility; and at the Summer Solstice when St John's fires (formerly the pagan fires of Oannes/Bacchus) were lit for "lustration" or ritual purification before rebirth.

For all these reasons, Ted and Sylvia would have regarded 9 Willow Street as a "poetic address" and 9, being the fertile number of both Themis and Saturn, would have made it "even better".

Yet even as she found the "ideal" writing environment, Sylvia recognized that she was "Fearful, inadequate desperate", worried about money, about publication, about "sloth, fear, vanity, meekness" but, most of all, about her own capacity for "choosing" and "making" her life. Having been used to the constant demands of school and college, she now swung between "joyous positive and despairing negative" (SPJ 20 June 1958), knowing that she had the free time and the companion she had wished for but afraid that her inner resources would fail her. Words like 'paralysis', 'despair' and 'doldrums' began to occur frequently in her journal. She made lists of things she must do: "produce a book of poems, stories, a novel, learn German & read Shakespeare & Aztec mythology and the origin of the species[sic]" (SPJ 20 June 1958), and she castigated herself if she deviated from her schedule.

These were the "turbines / Home and College had assembled" in her, the external demands which she had internalized and which kept her in perpetual anxiety and motion and "thundered the parquet". The actual move the new apartment lifted her spirits, but "black depression", "fear" and "panic" soon returned (SPJ 14 and 15 Sept. 1958). As she "hammered" at her typewriter trying to create her new self through her writing (Ted's imagery is that of the Alchemical Hermes being reborn from the Philosophical Egg) her "Panic Bird" rarely left her alone; and, in fact, it was her old self – the "old egg" of past experience in which she was still enclosed – which drove her.

Ted, too, was depressed (SPJ 27 Sept. 1958). Unlike Sylvia, who "Perched in the glare" on that "cliff-edge" (which describes both her emotional state and the bright sixth-floor, bay-window at which she wrote) Ted retreated inwards. In the poem he tells us that he shut out the world, the noise and the light, "And sank". In a letter to Lucas Myers from 9

Willow Street, Ted wrote: "My emotional life has been like a dead man's here until very recently"; he also said that there was (in Myers words) "a kind of natural starch in the New England air that gradually encrusted you" (CSBA 90).

In '9 Willow Street', Ted is "enclosed" by "wings of blackness". His "lumber", the dead wood which he carried with him, was not only his own past but also his need to be close to nature, something which he told Lucas Myers was disabled for him by the "chemistry" of American society. And maybe he also had in mind, when he chose the word 'lumber' for this poem, the willow bands with which the sun-god substitute was bound to a stock during the fertility rites of Cybele and Attis¹⁴, a ritual which he made the Reverend Lumb endure at the beginning of Gaudete.

More clearly, this lumber which Ted carried with him to the bottom of the river, is linked in the poem with "Jung's nigredo", the plunge into the darkness and chaos of the human subconscious. In "my black sack" (the personal pronoun confirms that it is Ted alone who is thus encased) Ted strikes "sulphur matches" in an attempt to "find the eyes" of Jung's nigredo, which, for Jung, are "the eyes of the spirit", "the eyes of the understanding and the imagination" (Jung Psychology and Alchemy 250). Sulphur is the purifying element¹⁵ which the Alchemist uses to break down the prima materia – to "Kill the King", and Jung quotes the Alchemists' dictum "Purge the horrible darkneses of our mind" and links these darkneses with the nigredo in which the spirit is fettered¹⁶. It seems, then, that Ted lit his sulphur matches in an attempt to purge himself of the lumber which fettered his spirit. It seems, too, that the sulphur matches which Ted lit were poems.

Most of the poems Ted wrote at this time were published in *Lupercal* in 1960. Speaking of these poems in an interview with Ekbert Faas in 1977, Ted said that "almost all" of them were "written as invocations to writing" (UU 209). He went on to say that his "main consciousness in those days was that it was impossible to write. So these invocations were just attempts to crack the apparent impossibility of producing anything". *Lupercal* notably contains poems which turn to Nature to invoke and celebrate the vital spirit. In the first poem, 'Things Present' (L 9) (and the first and last poems in all Ted's books were carefully chosen and had special significance¹⁷), Ted becomes "the tramp¹⁸ in the sodden ditch" in order to "Embody a now, erect a here", as if to create a space in which these poems and his own spirit might live. 'Fourth of July' (NCP 27), however, is an ironic comment on American Independence Day and more clearly describes Ted's perception of America (and of his own situation in America) at that time. In it, nature is "taxed and patrolled", independence is equated with hucksters, "monsters" are banished from "the right maps", and "the mind's wandering elementals / Ousted" from their mythical places of spirit and imagination wait "dully" in an urban world "taking nothing in".

So, suffering from the same sickness of spirit, Ted and Sylvia "huddled" together in Willow Street: he rocking in "infantile" blackness, feeding on her "nightmares and terrors": she "In a paralysis of terror-flutters", in an "airy Hell" in which her writing, which was her ladder to rebirth, was twenty-four hours of toil ("typewriter", "alarm clock" and

“new sentence” are run together with beautiful ambiguity) which came from nothing and lead to nothing. In imagery which describes the Alchemical hermaphrodite and the Sulphurous Alchemical process of destruction and purification, Ted depicts the reality of their life at that time and the struggles they endured. Sylvia’s journal entries amply testify to the “siamese-twinning” nature of their relationship, to the walks and the dreams which they shared, and to the “festering” such closeness sometimes fostered in each of them. Yet this “soul sepsis”, this “heaving dimension of chemical horror”, this Alchemical “Killing of the King”, which they shared inside Sylvia’s “Bell Jar”, should have been a step towards rebirth.

Conjunct pictureSignificantly, their “only escape” was into “arms / That reached upwards or downwards”, which suggests sexual union and is a suitably Saturnian suggestion. But since it was these arms which, Ted says, “rolled us along all night eastward”, these must have been arms other than their own, and Saturn (in the mud below) and the Goddess (in the air above) are subtly invoked. Yet, “what a waste!”. This phrase, which follows immediately in a line on its own, suggests Ted’s later recognition of the mistakes he and Sylvia were making and to which they were “spectre-blinded” at the time. Wrapped in each other as they were, they could not possibly succeed. Each alone might have “met with a new life”, because in Cabbala each must make their own journey in their own way, but together they were “off course” (like the fleeting birds which are associated with happiness in the following lines), being rolled “eastward” rather than westward (the traditional direction for the rebirth of the spirit). And this was not their only mistake.

“Happiness” is set in a line of its own in the text of the poem and is connected to “blown scraps” of vital natural energy in the seven lines which immediately follow. But happiness it seems, like the exotic American birds which briefly visit this poem, was so “momentary” that Ted and Sylvia failed to “identify” it. And the identification of happiness with nature, here, is the key to what Ted and Sylvia failed to recognize. For the Cabbalist and the Alchemist, as Jung points out in the pages where he discusses the purging of the nigredo, the “golden understanding” comes from “the inner light which God has lit in nature and in our hearts from the beginning” (Jung PA 270). Rebirth, in other words, comes from the vital spirit within and is reached through the heart not through the intellect: it is not reached by making schedules and lists or by “hammering” away at anything.

Now, as before on this Path of the Hermit, Ted is given a warning. In an appropriately “dizzy”, dream-like state, Ted encounters an emissary of the Goddess. Writing this poem, he presents his encounter with a bat as a symbolic event, a “scenario” staged by Fate; and, in the penultimate line of the poem, he connects it with the myth he and Sylvia “had sleepwalked into”. Suitably, the Goddess’s emissary in his darkness is a Mercurial shape-changer and trickster - “something” which originally appears to be soft, slug-like and harmless but which turns into a snarling, fanged, hyena-faced Fury.

Bats, in Ancient Greece were sacred to Demeter¹⁹ but more often they were associated with the other bat-winged, bloody-eyed, snake-haired, dog-fanged Furies, the Erinnyes,

who were born of Gaea after the blood of Uranus fell on her when Cronus castrated him. The Erinnyes pursued, tormented and drove mad those who shed the blood of family members (“blood shedding its own blood”, as Ted describes this in his version of the Oresteia (O 164))²⁰ but they were persuaded by the Goddess Athena to befriend Orestes, for which he renamed them ‘Eumenides’ : the Kindly Ones.

Ted beautifully invokes and contains the tiny bat-Fury in two separate but closely related sections of the poem (lines 73-96). In the second of these, he depicts himself (as at the end of the first poem on this Path) as a fool. There he is, a grown man entertaining a crowd on Boston Common by fighting a tiny bat, and getting bitten for his pains. At the same time, in the poem he is a foolish human attempting to control one of Fate’s terrible sisters. But he gave his blood-sacrifice freely and he treated the creature gently and with love: “cradling” it, he “offered it up” to the “wall of chestnut bark” where, “triumphant”, it vanished “upwards into where it came from”. This bat-Fury sent down from above moves as a bat might - “backwards” and “face-downwards” – but in doing so it effectively turns Ted’s world upside-down.

In the final stanza, Ted realizes the true foolishness of his action. American bats sometimes do carry rabies, so he had risked been infected, but he sees his folly also in metaphorical terms. The “tragedy ending” and the “ironic death” “secreted” in Fate’s scenario are not his own death from rabies, or Sylvia’s death at a later date, but the end of his and Sylvia’s joint poetic journey. Ironically, all their shared sacrifices and efforts carried the disease (unidentified by them) from which the enterprise would die, because they were sleepwalking into a flawed myth of their own “spectre-blinded” making. This was the deathly “bat-light” which they “were living in”.

Suitably for this Path which is presided over by Saturn, the poem ends with “death”: with two deaths, in fact. Ted connects the first death directly with the myth into which he and Sylvia had blindly sleepwalked: he connects the second with the dark, tormented, upside-down world in which they were living. Thus, at the end of this poem, Ted deliberately destroys both these mistakes and in doing so completes a poetic Alchemical and Cabbalistic ritual of purification. In reality, too, Ted’s and Sylvia’s shared myth did eventually die when Ted gave up the idea of a shared journey and concentrated on helping Sylvia to achieve her goal. Their situation changed, too, when they left Boston to travel around America and then returned to England.

‘The Afterbirth’ (BL 130-131) is the poem on the Path of the Hermit in the World of Yetzirah. On the surface, this poem describes the birth of Ted’s and Sylvia’s son, Nicholas, on 17 January 1962. Nicholas was born at Court Green, with Ted and a midwife helping Sylvia with the birth. In a letter to her mother the next day, Sylvia wrote: “at 5 minutes to 12... this great bluish boy shot out onto the bed in a tidal wave of water that drenched all four of us to the skin, howling lustily” (SPLH 18 Jan. 1962); and in a journal entry made at a later date she recorded the delivery of the afterbirth “into a pyrex bowl, which crimsoned with blood” (SPJ ‘THE MIDWIFE: WINIFRED DAVIES’, entry immediately following 7 May 1962). In a note on Sylvia’s poem ‘Totem’, Ted wrote that the pyrex bowl was “used on different occasions both for her son’s afterbirth and the

cleaned body of a hare" (SPCP 295).

'The Afterbirth' is clearly rooted in reality, but it also has a complex mythic level which tells of the dream "rubbished"; of the Son-Hero born into a sudden noon-sun-blinded, "tear-splitting dazzle"; of the Gorgon vanquished; and of Sylvia, at the moment of birth, a triumphant Goddess "laughing and weeping / Into the glare".

The dream, "the lotus-eater's whole island", is not just the placenta which has nourished the baby in the womb, it is also the "dream-land" to which Ted brought Sylvia in 'Error' (BL 122), the same dreamland in which they have both been walking as they pursued their shared poetic dream of creative rebirth²¹. This dreamland, now, is "offal", refuse, waste-stuff lying "rubbished" on "newsprint" which is both "blood-soaked" by the placenta and also, no doubt, by print which reports the usual bloody ills of the real world.

The son who is born is both Nicholas and a "shocking beauty", "the dazzler", one who bursts into the room, like Perseus, to confront the Gorgon. Ted sees him "flash-up" the "sunburned German", but the identity of this German is confused. The lines read as if the child was German, which he was not; or the German seems to refer to someone in a honeymoon memory; or (which is most likely in the Cabbalistic context of this Path) he is Sylvia's German father – the father who is more often represented as the Minotaur in Birthday Letters but who, here, is The Father killed (flashed-up) by The Son in a "blue-blackish" sunstroke hallucination experienced by Ted.

This last, alchemical, interpretation is supported by the parallel imagery of lines 10 – 12 and 13 – 16, and by the deliberate ambiguities which leave it unclear whether it was the son-hero, bursting into the bedroom "when the Gorgon / Arrived" who ripped off her face or whether the Gorgon herself did this; and whether the son was the sunburned German or whether he destroyed the German; and who exactly slammed down the Medusa-like, placenta-like octopus tripe on Ted's and Sylvia's "honeymoon quay" - which may, itself, be part of the "wedding picture" in 'Error' (BL 122). Such deliberate turmoil introduces an element of Saturnian and alchemical chaos, just as is found in the cyclical myths of Saturn – Cronus.

The birth in this poem marks a sudden change in the old order of Ted's and Sylvia's lives. As in any family, the birth of a child arouses strong feelings of love and jealousy, and family relationships must be readjusted. But the image Ted creates in this poem is also a mythic image in which Sylvia becomes the judgemental Goddess, Athena, helping the sun-hero, Perseus, to finally vanquish her one-time rival, the Gorgon, Medusa. Athena and Medusa were related, Medusa being the deathly Hag aspect of the Triple Goddess²², and a Moon Goddess whose blood, falling on the earth, fertilized it and breed new, serpentine, sexual life. She was, in fact, Nature; and she could be both beautiful and terrifying. Gorgon picture Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, describes Medusa as "a maid far-famed and fair... the jealous hope of suitors", whose hair "was her charm most rare". But Poseidon seduced Medusa in Athena's temple and for this, "lest such sacrilege should no penance earn", the jealous Athena turned the Gorgon's hair to

“loathsome snakes”²³.

Sylvia, at the time of Nicholas’s birth, displayed many aspects of the Goddess Athena. An undercurrent of judgemental sharpness and jealousy ran through her journal entries between New Year and 1 May 1962, roused especially by her neighbours’ daughter, Nicola Tyrer (SPJ Appendix 15, 1962). In the poems she wrote at that time, she saw mostly blackness, hooks and desolation in nature²⁴; and the moon looms cold but beautiful, as the rival resembling death, and as a merciless thing hissing “snaky acids”, which, Medusa-like, petrify “the will”²⁵. There is a sense, too, in which these poems were the afterbirth of Sylvia’s completion of *The Bell Jar* on 22 August 1961 (SPJ Note 438).

If, as I am suggesting, Sylvia is meant to be seen as Athena in Ted’s poem, and the afterbirth as her Moon Goddess rival, then the hare, too, has double meaning, for the Moon Goddess frequently takes the form of a hare. In the poem, the hare is already “a witchy familiar”, a shapeshifter who speaks with a human voice and may hobble “down from under the elms”.

The afterbirth in this poem also takes many forms: it is the Gorgon (as it is also in Sylvia’s poem ‘Medusa’, SPCP 224 – 6), sea-tripes, the lotus-eater’s island, a “fallen Eden” awaiting rebirth; and, in an ovenproof bowl with “a meaning / All to itself”, it is the jugged corpse of the hare – a dismembered Goddess, a totem animal (as it is in Sylvia’s poem ‘Totem’ (SPCP 264-5)) to be eaten in order to embody the Goddess’s powers.

Ted, seeing himself as an Egyptian tomb-wall shadow – a dog-headed man like the god Anubis, who conducts the souls of the dead through the Underworld – takes the afterbirth and buries it, significantly, in the earth. This was an ancient folk-practice which was believed to ensure the safety and fertility of the new-born child. Yet, this earth is not just the Court Green garden with its ancient burial mound. Ted describes it in the poem as a “motherly hump” (like a pregnant belly) of “ancient Britain”, the land which once belonged to Brigantia, the Celtic Mother Goddess of fertility and of poetry. Years later, Brigantia’s powers would be evident in Ted’s poetry: in *Remains of Elmet* (Faber, 1979), in particular²⁶, but also in the fertile Devon soil of Moortown Farm and the poems which grew from Ted’s involvement there (Moortown, Faber, 1979). The buried afterbirth, it seems, had fruitful results for Ted; and also, in quite a different way, for Sylvia.

Sylvia’s relationship to the hare in Ted’s poem is complex. She did not share Ted’s hunters’ view²⁷ of animals like hares, rabbits, grouse and other animals which are hunted and trapped for food: their differing perspectives are made abundantly clear in ‘Rabbit Catcher’ (BL 144 – 6). But in ‘The Afterbirth’, the hare is also the Goddess and, therefore, part of Sylvia’s own female nature. To refuse and deny and bury that part of herself – the irrational, dark, Moon Goddess part which is closest to Nature – and to allow the judgemental, retributive, Athena-like part of herself to dominate, as she did in *The Bell Jar*, was unbalanced and dangerous. So, the hare opens an accusing eye at her. So, too, it might hobble down “from under the elm”, where the afterbirth was buried, to call to her: “Mother! Mother!”, as if asking to be acknowledged and rescued, but also

claiming a relationship with Sylvia such as a witch's familiar might claim from one who suckled it.

Aurora picture Yet, although it was Sylvia that the hare might call to, Ted imagined it in "our yard". He, too, it seems was locking Nature out. And it was he who ran over and killed a hare on the A30 road, thereby locking "error beyond repair". Significantly, this particular hare (which Ted specifically calls "a witchy familiar") was "sent", as if by the Goddess and as if intended to be a sacrifice and a warning; and Ted's use of the word "error" again refers us back to the poem of that title (BL 122) and, thus, to his and Sylvia's fragile "wedding picture" dream world.

Sylvia, it seems, did not hear this particular warning. Only when Ted magically "re-formed" the hare on his page²⁸ in a hieroglyph (the word means, precisely, "a sacred word, a symbol or inscription": 'Hiero' = Gk. 'sacred, holy') did she hear its death scream and, when she did, it was unstoppable, like the flow of the heart's blood from "a burst artery".

Ted's use of simile in the final six lines of the poem suggests far more than Sylvia's reaction to the Goddess's / hare's distress. His reference to the telephone which she picks up, "curious", makes a link with Sylvia's poem 'Words heard by accident, over the phone' (SPCP 202-3) and with the powerful and terrible feelings and events which were precipitated by her subsequent jealousy of Assia Wevill (whose voice she believed she heard). Sylvia's poem is permeated with imagery of snake and octopus, and of muddy, "fertile", Saturnian and witchy energy. She writes of "the bowel-pulse" and of a Cronus-like, Hag-like, "lover of digestibles"; and bitter anger pours from the poem as her world is overturned. It is a powerful and agonizing poem, expressing the same terrible and unstoppable emotions as those engendered by Ted's images of something "moon-eyed" and flower frail being "ripped up" and "disembowelled".

In the final line of Ted's poem, the hare / Goddess is alive again and screaming like a Fury. Given the links with Sylvia which have just been made, and the Path on which this poem lies, it is hard not to see the hare / Goddess as having lain hidden within Sylvia until the time was ripe for her rebirth as a dark, destructive and deathly Hag. In Cabbalistic terms, too, this would be seen as the result of Sylvia's denial and suppression of an essential part her spirit – the part which should have balanced Justice with Mercy and Love. This, then, was not the rebirth which Sylvia and Ted had planned or expected. The Hermit's light, when it was finally revealed, was Divine but vengeful.

In the World of Assiah, far from the Divine Source, all errors are compounded. Assiah is the World of Shells or Qlippoth, the negative energies of the Sephiroth, and 'Telos' (BL 176 – 7), the poem on the Hermit's Path in this World, is full of these energies. In particular, it deals with the Qlippoth of Tiphereth (Sephira 6) and Chesed (Sephira 4), which lie at each end of this Path.

Tiphereth, at the heart of the Tree, is a symbol of "centrality, balance and wholeness"²⁹ and it has special importance for our own consciousness of our outer and inner worlds.

Tiphereth, if its power has been used correctly in pursuit of The Great Work, can reveal “the blazing Sun of the Tree”. On the other hand, because its Qliploth is “Hollowness” and its Illusion is “Identification” (especially an identification of Self based on false beliefs), Tiphereth may reveal “an empty room”.

Chesed’s Qliploth is “Ideology” and its “Vices” are those of “all the other Sephiroth writ large”. Used positively, Chesed’s energies are creative and expansive - a benign and humble expression of mercy and love, such as a holy hermit might transmit. Used wrongly, to build on and expand a false ideology, Chesed’s energies become tyrannous, greedy and selfish. The “Illusion” of Chesed is the illusion of “Being Right”, and such arrogance is the direct opposite of the humility needed for the positive expression of Chesed’s powers.

The duality of both Tiphereth (the Sun or an empty room) and Chesed (love as merciful or tyrannous) pervades Ted’s poem, ‘Telos’, and the Qliploth of both these Sephiroth are demonstrated in the picture of Sylvia which Ted conveys. The image of Self which Sylvia projected was one of a capable and confident woman who could set her own goals and achieve them through her own ability, effort and will-power. This was the mask she wore, the identity she adopted. Beneath the mask, however, she feared there was nothing, and it was this fear which caused her panics and depressions. In Cabbalistic terms, Sylvia’s reliance on will-power and rational control was a hollow ideology, and under the tyranny of these false beliefs her creative powers became selfish and destructive.

The letter Alpha, one of the many meanings of which is ‘the Unchanged Primal Cause’ (or, in other words, Telos: the Final Cause, Nature), is the perfect symbol for all this, and, even, for the resulting fall which Sylvia experiences at the end of Ted’s poem.

In the poem, and in the world in general, there are “Too many Alphas”. Just some of the things listed under ‘Alpha’ in a dictionary of symbols³⁰ are: an elm, the Trinity, God, New Year and other beginnings, an Ox, an Ibis (Thoth / Anubis), adultery, a favourable judgement, and the Sun. In addition, Robert Graves lists many goddesses who are represented by the letter ‘A’ (“the birth letter”), most of whom are Mother goddesses and / or Moon goddesses: most, in other words, are aspects of the Triple Goddess. Amongst those listed are Black Annis, a Moon goddess who was “concerned with a May-Eve hare-hunt”, and the Goddesses, Athena (WG 369 – 372), both of whom are especially relevant to the poems on this Path.

Ted associates many of these meanings of Alpha with Sylvia in the imagery of ‘Telos’. For her, he writes, Alphas were “too many” and “too much”. She was “Sunstruck” with Alpha, sick from it. The description, “Eye-sick”, suggests sun-sickness but the paronomasia with ‘I-sick’ also suggests selfishness and self-delusion; and, since Sylvia’s eyes were especially remarked on in ‘18 Rugby Street’ and ‘The Afterbirth’, the image links her again with the Goddess Athena, whose identifying features in Greek poetry were her brilliant eyes and her aegis.

At school, Sylvia was an Alpha (A-Grade) student: but Ted's poem suggests that she gained nothing more from school than good grades and the belief that this was what counted in life. When she "kicked school" – meaning colloquially "left it behind" but, here, physically spurning it too – it "collapsed" in nothing but Alphas (which is, itself, an ironic comment on the purpose of school).

Sylvia's sickness, a suicidal depression in which she felt "sterile, empty, unlive, unwise and UNREAD [sic]" was precipitated by "fear of failing to live up to the fast & furious prize-winning pace" of her life up to that time (SPLH 28 Dec. 1953). And the electric shock therapy which Sylvia was given after her suicide attempt, was intended to cure that sickness. In 'Telos' it is possible to read the Alpha "sky-signs" as the "lightning" of shock therapy which went wrong (WP 180) – as, for example, the Jove-like appearance of Johnny Panic in "a nimbus of arc lights" with lightning in "his beard" and "his eye", which Sylvia described in her story of that name³¹ – but there were other more influential Alphas in her sky following her recovery. Important people like Olive Higgins Prouty and Mary Ellen Chase helped Sylvia a great deal by guiding and supporting her plans; and she won many prizes and successes, including acceptance by Cambridge University and the award of a Fulbright Scholarship³².

By 1956, Sylvia had come to regard her recovery from her suicide attempt and depression as a rebirth. She wrote of "waking to a new world, with no name, being born again, and not of woman" (SPJ 26 Feb. 1956). But in her new life she was still, as Ted writes in 'Telos', "covered" (a carefully chosen word) in Alphas: she had "burrowed" into the darkness both literally and metaphorically, and she had turned Aurelia "inside out" with anxiety, but the Self she "came up" with was the same Self, wearing the same Alpha mask, and with the same fears as before.

The phrase, "your mother", also has double meaning. In Sylvia's own poem of rebirth, 'Poem for a Birthday' (SPCP 131 – 137), she makes the same connection between the dark cellar and the earth as is conveyed by the word "burrowed" in 'Telos'. But the earth, there, is also her mother – a devouring mother, who eats her children, as does Nature and as does the dark Hag aspect of the Moon Goddess. So, in both 'Poem for a Birthday' and 'Telos', it was the dark Moon Goddess to whom Sylvia tried to return but who was ultimately rejected for an Athena-like Self after her rebirth. Sylvia, in her own poem, first becomes one with the devouring mother, then banishes her ("Mother keep out of my barnyard"). She swallows time, "the great umbilicus of the sun", and with it she swallows "the endless glitter" which in both poetry and myth belongs to Athena. Finally, she is mechanically re-made in "a city of spare parts". In reality, as in 'Telos', Sylvia's return to mother earth, when she buried herself in the cellar intending to die, was abruptly reversed: the mother was turned inside-out and the darkness became buried within Sylvia, not she in it. In the imagery of Sylvia's poem, and in the re-making of herself which the writing of the poem imaginatively re-enacted, "the vase, reconstructed, houses / the elusive rose" or, put another way, it is the shadowy aspect of Love which lies cupped in the hand-made bowl and which is as important as the visible aspect. Sylvia acknowledged, there, the existence of both.

The simile which Ted uses in 'Telos' to describe this turning inside-out of "your mother" is not, on the face of it, very apt but it, too, conveys the dual aspect of Love. A feather pillow is soft and comforting, not qualities usually associated with Sylvia's mother, Aurelia, by either Sylvia or Ted. Real as Aurelia's love for Sylvia was, it seems generally to have been expressed in a practical, efficient, matter-of-fact way – rather as one might expect the Goddess Athena's love to be, for Athena was also the fierce protectress of mothers and their children. The soft, feathery, ecstatic, floating kind of love, however, is associated with the Moon Goddess (as Diana rather than Hecate) and if you rip up a feather pillow the result is a cloud of feathers which resemble soft, drifting flakes of snow. Perhaps it is stretching the imagination too far to link this image to the snow out of which the hare / Goddess pleads in 'The Afterbirth', but the meaning is the same: something soft and gentle has been ripped up, turned out, rejected.

Other images which Ted chooses in 'Telos' to describe Sylvia's life after that first rebirth all demonstrate the Alpha nature of her new Self and the self-destructive and Athena-like aspects of her search for love. Rumpelstiltskin, in the Grimm brothers' story, stamped so hard that he destroyed himself. Sylvia, in Birthday Letters, finally achieves union with her Minotaur father, but it destroys her; and in real life she was united with him only through death. In her poetry, Sylvia reached her father through her Ariel (another Alpha) voice and her love turned to anger, but it was these angry poems which were most applauded by other women (who often did behave like a "whole band" of destructive Alpha goddesses). Sylvia's search for love, too, was rational and will-driven – like a fairground game at which she was expert. All her boyfriends were Alpha males, "a straight row of Alphas", and she shot them down just like that. Her "prize" in this love game was the reinforcement of the image she chose to project of an Alpha "doll" – blonde, pretty and desirable.

That doll persona was "plastic" (malleable but artificial and hollow) and Sylvia smashed it, Ted says, "with a kitchen stool" – an image and a meaning which he used earlier in Birthday Letters in 'The Minotaur' (BL 120). In that moment of uncontrolled anger, Sylvia found a new, "tick-tock Alpha" beginning and (as discussed in The Path of the Emperor) the energy which fuelled her Ariel voice but which led her, too, to the Minotaur and to disaster. In 'Telos', that same moment of uncontrolled anger is the culmination of a sequence of angry, calculated and vengeful acts. But in destroying the "doll", Sylvia also wounded herself and it was her own blood which "signed" the urban "snowscape" through which she then ran. This bloody signature suggests the anguish which Sylvia later bled into her Ariel poems, but the fact that in 'Telos' the blood came from her "escaping heel" is also significant.

In myth, the heel was the only vulnerable part of a Sun-hero's body. Often it was the dark Love Goddess or the Hag who inflicted the wound or caused it to be inflicted³³, and such a wound was always fatal. It is appropriate, then, that Sylvia, as an embodiment of the wrathful Athena (whose father was a Sun god) should display the bloodied heel of a wounded sun-hero. And her flight, too, is shown as a desperate attempt, "Anyhow" (the word stands alone, suggesting the most desperate of measures), to escape from "The Furies of Alpha" which belong, as in the other poems

on this path, to the Moon Goddess / Hag.

In Cabbalistic terms, Sylvia “hurdled every letter of the Alphabet”, rather than working carefully along each Path and learning as she went. So, she “hurled” herself “beyond Omega”, the end which should have brought enlightenment and completion. The final image of the poem is confusing, but it can be understood in Cabbalistic terms, because the shape of the Hebrew letter Aleph (Alpha) is formed by two Yods (the letter of this Path), one above and one below a diagonal line: symbolically, this shows that the Divine Spark (from which everything in our world began) exists both above and below the firmament of our material world. Above is the universe of the “higher water”, a place of blazing sun in which the Soul will find joy: below is the cold, glittering universe of the “lower water” in which the Soul will find only bitterness. Each is a universe of Alpha; and Sylvia “fell” into the “glittering”, lower waters of the two.

‘Telos’ encompasses Saturn as Father Time and it follows Sylvia’s life from beginning to end, twice overturning her world with a form of death and rebirth. But the lessons of Cabbala were not learned and each new Self embodied the same mistaken ideology. Inevitably, this led to disaster and Telos / Nature is shown as the Final Cause of this. Having remained hidden, like the Hermit’s light, Nature finally achieved her ends and her power was acknowledged, but only in the darkest possible way.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Mystical Significance of Hebrew Letters (Yod)
2. Throughout Birthday Letters, Sylvia’s father is associated with the labyrinth and the Minotaur. Also, with Saturn-Cronus as the presiding figure in this poem, it is notable that on 29 March 1959 (SPJ) Sylvia recorded in her journal that in a psychotherapy session with Ruth Beuscher she had explored the (presumably subconscious) belief that she might have killed and castrated her father.
3. In the Bible, for example, see Leviticus 4:1-6; and Numbers 23 (where sacrifice is also associated with magical practices). The number 7 was also associated with sacrifice and bulls in many ancient spiritual-rebirth cults, such as the Mysteries of Mithra, which Joseph Campbell discusses at length in *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*, Ch. 6:III.
4. As discussed in earlier chapters, Lucas Myers served this same guiding, Mercurial purpose in both ‘Visit’ and ‘St Botolphs’.
5. Chapter 11 of *Crow Steered Bergs Appeared* describes the “historical details” which lie behind Ted’s poem. Lucas Myers writes that Ted asked him (in a letter dated 18 March 1956) “to do an errand I didn’t want to do” but he did agree to meet Sylvia in London and on March 23 he did escort her to the flat in Rugby Street where Ted was living.

6. This letter is amongst the Sylvia Plath papers held at the Lilly Library, Indiana University. (Plath mss. II, Correspondence, Box 6/6 (+1), 1956 Mar.-Apr.)
7. Hughes/Sagar correspondence. British Library, Dep. 10003(10). 15th August 1997.
8. On April 13th 1957 (SPLH), Sylvia wrote to her mother recording "Our first real professional "British" acceptance". The Atlantic Monthly had accepted two of her poems: 'Spinster' and 'Black Rook in Rainy Weather'; and one of Ted's: 'Famous Poet', a choice which Ted would have regarded as auspicious.
9. Toad-stones (so called because they are said to come from the body of a toad) are magical stones which witches used to help people achieve their goals. But in Hans Christian Anderson's parable, *The Toad*, the stone, or jewel, in the head of the toad is the spark of sun which causes "continual striving and the desire to go upward - ever upward". So, the ugliest toad may be driven to journey from the dark, sunless well into the light, and the spark will return to the sun. Sylvia knew Anderson's stories well (see SPJ, 4 Jan. 1958, for example).
10. Even in photographs, Sylvia's image seems curiously unfixed. Apart from the few iconic photographs which are seen so often that she is instantly identified, many look as if they are of different people. Compare photographs 3, 12, 15 and 20, in *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, for example.
11. Fetter Lane is in the City of London and, as Peter Ackroyd notes in *London: The Biography* (Random House, 2000. pp. 229-237), it has always been a boundary, an edge. This is appropriate for Ted's and Sylvia's plunge into a "Niagara" of shared emotions. Appropriate, too, for a couple about to become united, is the more common meaning of 'fetter' (to bind or shackle). If Fetter Lane was the true location of Sylvia's London hotel, then the name was another coincidence in their lives.
12. Robert Graves has much to say about the Willow in *The White Goddess*, especially in Chapter 10, 'The Tree Alphabet'.
13. Caesar described the wicker figures of gods made by Druids in Britain and claimed that human sacrifices were burned in them. Frazer describes vegetative Green George ceremonies in Europe in which the Willow was ritually cut down and its branches used to clothe a figure used in mock sacrifice to ensure the fertility of the land and waters. He describes old and sick people spitting three times on the cut willow and saying: "You will soon die, but let us live" (Frazer, GB 166-7).
14. See Frazer: 'The Myth and Ritual of Attis', *The Golden Bough*, Ch. XXXIV.
15. Sulphur has long been used in medicine for cleansing and purifying purposes and was once commonly used to sterilize sickrooms after infectious diseases such as diphtheria.

16. “the “darknesses of our mind” coincides unmistakably with the nigredo” (Jung PA 271).

17. This poem is not included in New Selected Poems, possibly because it had served a special purpose in Lupercal and that purpose was not relevant to the more diverse collection of poems.

18. Tramps, in Ted’s poems, are another kind of hermit, living close to nature and keeping the vital energies intact.

19. The Earth Goddess, Demeter, took the form of a horse in order to escape Poseidon (Saturn) who was pursuing her, but he changed into a stallion and raped her. She was so infuriated by this that she took on the aspect of a Fury and hid in a cave. In ‘Autumn Nature Notes’ in Season Songs, Ted invented his own myth for the Horse-chestnut tree, associating it with the “swirly grain” belonging to the Earth Goddess, and describing it as a “plump mare” which bears the dragon-slaying hero towards his “sunbeam princess” (SS 46-7).

20. Orestes, having killed his father, was pursued by the Erinnyes but at his trial Athena intervened on his behalf and he was acquitted. The Erinnyes challenged this judgement, threatening to make the earth barren with spilled blood, but Athena made a pact with them. She promised them that if they lived in her sanctuary in Athens, she would ensure that all would pay tribute to them. In return they must bless the land and ensure fertility. Because they agreed to this, Orestes renamed them ‘Eumenides’, the Kindly Ones. Ted’s version of Aeschelus’s Oresteia ends with this story.

21. The lotus is a common symbol of rebirth.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional
Wheel cardKaph path
The Path of The Wheel of Fortune – Kaph

Tarot card 10. Tree path 11.

Joining Sephiroth 4 (Chesed) and 7 (Netzach).

'The Machine', 'The Literary Life', 'Setebos', 'Brasilia'.

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The Path of Kaph lies on the Pillar of Force and joins Sephiroth 4 (Chesed: Mercy) with Sephiroth 7 (Netzach: Victory, Eternity). It is a Path, therefore, on which essential, creative powers prevail, rather than form-giving controlling powers.

All the symbols associated with this Path in Tarot, Cabbala, Alchemy, and Astrology represent the Divine, dynamic, impulse of life and the continuous repetition of this impulse within the material world. Without it our world would not exist. It is the motive power of the supreme God; the cycles of Nature; the continual interaction of Air, Fire, Water and Earth (or, in Alchemy, of Sulphur, Mercury and Salt with prima materia); and the ever changing circumstances of our world and our lives under the influence of the revolving stars. In biological terms, it is our own life energies. In psychological terms it is the subconscious, changing and repeating patterns of needs and wants which drive us.

In Tarot, the dynamic impulse is represented by The Wheel of Fortune. In Cabbala (as the meditation for this Path conveys) it is "The All Father in three forms, Fire, Air, Water", and it is represented by the Hebrew letter, Kaph, which means the "Palm of the Hand" (which transmits the power as Love) or the "Fist" (which demonstrates its Supreme Force). A second Cabbalistic meditation for this Path conveys some of the turmoil of constant change: "In the Whirlings is War".

In religion and mythology, the Divine motivating power belongs to the supreme God, Creator of the Universe. His controlling hand keeps the Wheel of Life in motion, but others may influence its effects on the individuals who inhabit the created universe. So, for example, Bacchus, Krishna and Adonis, (Sun gods, children of the Divine Source) are all born into our world and are associated with the music and the dance which keep the wheel turning harmoniously. And so, in Greek mythology, Zeus delegates control of individual destiny to the three Moerae or Fates: Clotho (who spins life's thread), Lachesis (Chance, who measures out the thread) and Atropos (the inescapable Fate who cuts the thread and ends each individual life).

The Wheel of Fortune which belongs to the Moerae / Fates, is the wheel which appears on the traditional Tarot card for this Path, and various figures are shown on the rim of the Wheel. A human-headed creature travels downwards towards the earth; a dog-headed creature travels upwards towards the heavens; and a sphinx with a sword surmounts the wheel. The wheel itself often has features which identify it with the Uroborus, the tail-eating snake of Nature.

For Cabbalists, the human-headed creature is the unenlightened traveller who, like the Hermit on the previous path, moves down into the earthy darkness of Saturn / Cronus. If this darkness is negotiated successfully and its visions are understood, then the dog-headed Anubis / Mercury will guide the traveller's Soul upwards towards the light. The wheel turns constantly, and the traveller may make many journeys on its rim before true enlightenment is achieved but the sphinx¹ is ever present, and her riddle needs to

be understood and answered or her sword will fall and the traveller will be destroyed

For the Cabbalistic traveller, the questions to be answered and understood are questions about Self and one's place in this world. On this Path of Kaph, it is the inner Self, in particular, which must be studied: the force and the patterns of our own subconscious needs and feelings must be understood, balanced and controlled so that they do not rule our own lives or the lives of others. Insight is necessary: and unselfishness. Above all, equilibrium is necessary if the traveller is to live in harmony with all the World's energies. In Cabbalistic terms, we must acknowledge and accept the supreme power of the Divine Source in the World and allow it to be expressed in a balanced way through the Divine creative power within us. The number for this Path, which is 11, visually represents this equilibrium as two equal lines standing side-by-side, and its importance is such that 11 is regarded as a Master Number – one which is never reduced by adding its component digits together.

'The Machine' (BL 25), which is the poem on the Path of Kaph in the Atziluthic World, is fairly clearly an Archetypal representation of the Wheel of Fortune in motion. Sylvia, from the very start of the poem has descended into the devouring darkness of Saturn / Cronus and her fears and panics, needs and desires control her. Sylvia's journal for 10 March 1956, from which Ted quotes, is full of the 'Whirlings' of Sylvia's subconscious and the 'war' of energies, imaginative fantasies, fears and furies which drove her. It is full, too, of unstoppable wheels and crushing weights. In fact, the whole journal entry is a perfect example of a descent into the subconscious and of the powerful, chaotic and terrible energies which may be encountered there. These energies, in Ted's poem, are the "Juggernaut" which moved towards him, and "yawned" him into their "otherworld interior".

For Ted, at that time, nothing was certain and his description of himself in the poem mimics this uncertainty: "Most likely" he was "just sitting"; "Maybe" he was drinking with his friend Lucas. He sees himself as having "no more purpose" than his own dog – just like the Fool on the traditional Tarot card. But he had no "real dog": nothing to warn him of impending change or of the "Juggernaut" which would take over his life.

Jaganath picture 'Juggernaut' is a word derived from the name of the Hindu Deity, Lord Jagannath, who is Lord of the Universe. In English, the word is used to represent any great, unstoppable, crushing force², so it conveys an image which is wholly appropriate to this Path. As Lord of the Universe, too, Lord Jagannath is the Mummy / Daddy of all the World's energies; and the ritually carved image of him which rides in the great Chariot, Nandigosh, at his temple in Puri, does have a "grotesque mask" of a face. In 'The Machine', however, "Mummy / Daddy" also suggests the real-life parental energies which helped determine the path along which the wheels of Sylvia's mind turned. And the Juggernaut of Sylvia's subconscious, as her diary entry reveals, was certainly "half quarry" (full of the imaginative imagery from which her poems came) and "half hospital" (full of fevers, disease and death).

In Cabbalistic terms, the whirling of the energies is constant (The Wheel never stops)

but the direction or way in which they move can be changed. This cannot be done by will alone (although Sylvia, in her journal entry, determines to “plot and plan and manipulate” her path), any more than brute force can suddenly stop or change the direction of Lord Jagannath’s huge Chariot, but it may be achieved through understanding and gentle control. Those who pull the Chariot, and those who ride the Wheel of Life, must balance knowledge of their own abilities and strengths with what they know about the “machine” they seek to guide, and with what they can continually feel about its movement. Successful changes of direction require knowledge and intuition; understanding and skill.

In ‘The Machine’, Ted suggests that the momentum and direction of Sylvia’s progress through life did not change. Instead, the energies which drove her engulfed Ted, his children (his choice of pronoun suggests all Ted’s children, including Shura and, of course, his poetic creations) and his life.

In the final lines of the poem, past and future are joined, just as they are on The Wheel of Life and on The Wheel of Fortune. What had been possible when Ted and Sylvia first met is no longer possible: the steps they began building together are “now stone” (‘now’, suggesting that they were formerly less fixed); the door he approaches is “now red”, the colour of blood and of the Hag goddess, not the colour of spirit and enlightenment; and Sylvia is no longer herself, alive with “still time” (this linkage of these two words effectively stops the Wheel) “to talk” and perhaps change direction: Sylvia, it seems, in the unstopped time since her death has become something else: an iconic image, perhaps, created by others.

In the World of Briah, in which the energies are less archetypal and are more clearly associated with the imaginative and creative energies of the traveller, the poem on the Path of Kaph is, appropriately, ‘The Literary Life’ (BL 75-6). It is appropriate, too, that the imagery in this poem is drawn from familiar childhood fantasies and fairy stories. The Fates are represented by a single fairy godmother in her tower; the Wheel of Fortune is her spinning wheel; and she spins the thread of Life on her spindle and works it with her bobbin and her needle.

Sylvia, herself, after her first meeting with the American poet, Marianne Moore³, in April 1955, described her as being “as vital and humorous as someone’s fairy godmother, incognito” (SPLH 16 April 1955). Inspired by Marianne Moore’s own poetic style, and elaborating on this fairy godmother image of her, Sylvia wrote a syllabic poem, ‘The Princess and the Goblins’ (SPCP 333), from which ‘The Literary Life’ clearly borrows. Both poems are about the literary life – about the fabrication of poems, the aspirations and the influences which shape them, the hope-filled initial steps towards success, and the disastrous endings caused by the working out of witchy fate. The similarities and the differences between the two poems are curious and fascinating.

Sylvia’s poem opens with a statement: “From fabrication springs the spiral stair”. This stair is no ordinary stair, but a “visionary ladder” up which the princess is drawn by the healing and “holy” light of the moon. Leaving her fever-bed (to which she had been

brought by a “waspy pin” in a malignant witch’s embroidery) the princess climbs into the “ancient, infinite and beautiful” presence of her “legendary godmother”. The metaphorical parallels with Sylvia’s own life are strong. Sylvia’s art was the fabrication of poems and one of her poetic heroes was Yeats, for whom the tower, the spiral stair and the moon were important symbols of the poetic imagination. ‘The Princess and the Goblins’ was amongst the poems Sylvia wrote in the year after her recovery from her suicidal depression, so, the sick princess could well be Sylvia; and the “legendary godmother”, whose strong thread is proof against all “artful wizards”, certainly has the powers and abilities which Sylvia attributed to Marianne Moore. In Sylvia’s eyes, Marianne Moore was one of “the ageing giantesses & poetic godmothers” of American poetry (SPJ 29 March 1958) – a woman who took her place amongst the “big, unscared practising poets” (SPJ 25 Feb. 1957) and was the equal of such artful poetic wizards as W.H Auden, Stephen Spender and T.S. Eliot. Between 1955, when Sylvia first met her, and July 1958, when she returned some of Sylvia’s poems with a “spiteful letter” (SPJ 17 July 1958), Sylvia looked to her for inspiration, encouragement and help.

By June 1958, when Ted first met Marianne Moore, Sylvia’s ‘godmother’ had become an influential poetic mentor for him, too. Her judgement of his poetry in *Hawk in the Rain* had helped to win him Harper’s ‘first publication’ contest (SPJ 25 Feb. 1957) and she was willing to support his applications for various grants. So, however real the narrow stair may have been up which he and Sylvia climbed to her New York apartment, both of them had already climbed her narrow stair to poetic achievement: she had judged their work and both were clearly able to fabricate the sort of poetry which met her particular poetic standards.

Marianne Moore’s standards were high, and her intellect, her Imagist style and her use of syllabic verse were highly regarded amongst those poets of the mid-twentieth century whose work Sylvia and Ted most admired. The goal Sylvia and Ted shared, however, was not to copy the style of others but to learn from it in order to develop their own, unique, poetic voices. This is what Sylvia was doing in ‘The Princess and the Goblins’. In this poem, her fabric(ation) was smoothly woven to support a pretty picture, and she left no loose ends: it is like a skilfully crafted, rather conventional, apprentice sampler. But there is a deeper level to it, too.

Unlike conventional fairy stories, Sylvia’s poem has no happy ending. The boy who is rescued from the goblins by the princess has no imagination and he does not see the spun gold fabrication which she tries to show him, or the fairy godmother. He sees only ordinary, everyday things. So, in his rational, unimaginative appraisal, all is reduced to mechanical “clockwork” – the moonlight is dispelled, the poetic magic is destroyed, and the fairy godmother vanishes. At this deeper level, where the bright sun of rationality reduces the imaginative, poetic, phantoms of the moon to a “silly scene” of apple rinds and straw, Sylvia’s poem expresses strong reservations about an over-rational, over-rigid and over-realistic approach to poetry, however brilliant it may be.

Ted’s poem, ‘The Literary Life’, expresses similar reservations. Unlike Sylvia’s poem, it is anything but regularly syllabic, but its images are as vivid and precise as those of any

Imagist poet and its rhythms are as close to the natural, musical phrasing of speech as it is possible to be. Whilst creating the exact, detailed, colourful sort of picture Marianne Moore would have valued, it demonstrates that conforming to her strict patterns of poetry⁴ is not the only, or indeed the best, way for a poet to find his or her voice. In the first part of the poem (lines 1 - 15), Ted and Sylvia (like the princess and her boy in Sylvia's poem) ascend the godmother's stairs. In Ted's poem, however, it is not the boy who spoils the poet's magic but Marianne Moore herself. It was her coin – her style of poetry, the “hum of the old wheel”, which was “Then the coin” of the day (one of the meanings of ‘coin’ is ‘fabrication’) – which was “compulsory” for those seeking to gain her approval and support. To follow that path, as Sylvia and Ted were doing at that time, was to continue the ordinary, everyday, “quotidian scramble”, in order to win fashionable, public success. That path, however, was the “subway” – the way below the true way - and that is what they eventually learned.

Ted implicitly criticizes Marianne Moore's poetic style in his description of her. Unlike Sylvia, who showed her as a benign godmother, he draws her as a witch. The bric-à-brac of her home; her bright, rapid-fire, intelligent talk; her dainty appearance – all are accurately conveyed, but Ted's choice of words is precise and cruel. She is a “curio relic of Americana”, whose voice (real and poetic) is “the flickering hum of the old wheel”⁵. Her sharpness is employed in “darning”, rather than in new creation. And her work is to produce a cold, protective shell of “Chain-mail”, on which she embroiders, in course “crewel-work” (the paronomasia with ‘cruel’ is damning), lifeless, metallic⁶ images of plants and animals. What is seen of her, and what her work reveals, is not her body or her emotions but her “face” – and that is “tiny” and unfree, like a bobbin on a spindle. It is tempting to see Ted's poem as a practical demonstration of Marianne Moore's dictum that real poetry presents “imaginary gardens with real toads in them” (MM ‘Poetry’⁷): the real toad in his garden being the witch hidden beneath the fairy godmother's “face”.

Ted's question, “Why shouldn't we cherish her?” is, after all this, an ironic and rhetorical question. It is asked in the present tense, which suggests that he felt, as he wrote it, that he had sufficiently diminished whatever power she once had over him and Sylvia, and that there was no longer any reason not to cherish this “curio relic of Americana”.

The second part of ‘The Literary Life’ (lines 16 - 34) refers to another syllabic poem which Sylvia wrote in 1958. On Mayday that year, Sylvia described the itch to write “applied by reading Marianne Moore & Wallace Stevens etc.” as so strong that it disturbed her equilibrium (SPJ 1 May 1958). ‘Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbour’ (SPCP 95) must have been written at about that time, because it was accepted for publication by Howard Moss at The New Yorker just a few weeks later. It is a far more sophisticated poem than ‘The Princess and the Goblins’, and Sylvia was thrilled when Howard Moss wrote on his acceptance letter that he thought it “a marvelous poem” (SPJ 25 June 1958). Her author's proofs of the poem arrived on 3rd July, and Sylvia called it “my star piece” (SPJ 4 July 1958), so she was shocked when she received “a queerly ambiguous spiteful letter” from Marianne Moore (SPJ 17 July 1958) criticizing both of the poems she had sent her⁸.

"I cannot believe she got so tart & acidy simply because I sent her carbon copies", Sylvia wrote in her journal (SPJ 17 July 1958): but she concluded (getting a little acidy herself) that sending carbon copies to the "American Lady of Letters" had indeed been her "great & stupid error". Ted, as he says in 'The Literary Life', saw that Marianne Moore disliked the intensity and the "ghostly gloom" which pervades and underlies Sylvia's two poems but he, too, thought Marianne Moore was being arrogantly sarcastic. And his consignment of her to the "second or third circle" of his Inferno, suggests that he also thought she was jealously defending her position of power in the American world of poetry from a younger and clearly very able rival.

Ted's use of the word "engross" is central to this view (as it is central to this section of the poem). The dictionary meaning of 'engross' is 'write in large letters' or 'express in legal form': it suggests power and judgement, both of which belonged to Marianne Moore. The word 'gross' alone, however, can mean 'rank', 'overfed', 'course' and 'greedy', and these are the meanings which resonate most strongly in Ted's use of 'engross'. Ted's Inferno is, presumably, like Dante's⁹, wherein the second circle is for those that lust makes sinful, including those who grossly misuse their power in order to gain their own desires; and the third circle is for those who live gluttonous lives, especially those who fight their own equals for control of a city. By consigning Marianne Moore to the hells of one or other of these circles, Ted suggests that she jealously misused the power she had to either encourage or to hurt Sylvia, who looked up to her and was inspired by her as a poet. On the Path of Kaph, the palm of the hand or the fist may be used by those who are in just such a position as Marianne Moore's: she, it seems, on this occasion used her fist, and for this Ted damns her. Choosing her own word, "engross", as a weapon, he turns it against her, having long ago taken its particular sharp point "deep in [his] thumb", like a jealous fairy-godmother's needle.

Sylvia, too, was wounded: cast down from the heights to which The New Yorker acceptance of two of her poems had lifted her. No doubt she wept, as Ted says she did, but by the time she wrote her journal entry she was more concerned about the outcome of her application for a Saxon grant than about Marianne Moore's comments on her poems (SPJ 17 July 1958). She had, after all, The New Yorker acceptance to confirm their worth; and Ted's encouragement and his belief in her ability to lift her spirits.

A decade later, Sylvia was dead; and Marianne Moore was in her eighties but still "holding court". Ted pictures her as an ancient fairy-tale creature – "dainty and bright" under the petal brim of one of the large-brimmed hats she favoured. He describes her pursed lips and her skin - crumpled and fragile but soft and silky – and she reminds him of some small mouse-like creature – a dormouse or a bat. But her voice was still needle sharp, and the concession to Sylvia's ability (which she "insisted" on making) was not to praise Sylvia's poetry but a prose piece, 'Ocean 1212-W' (in Ted's poem she forgets the 'W') which exactly fitted her own Imagist criteria. Sylvia's article (which was written for radio) is beautifully written but it is, as Marianne Moore ambiguously describes it in Ted's poem, "so lit": lit with the glow of memory and the colours and sounds of the sea; but also a very literary, carefully shaped, semi-autobiographical, "journalistic"¹⁰ piece of

writing.

Even after Sylvia's death, it seems, Marianne Moore could not bring herself to be generous to her. So, in the final eleven lines of 'The Literary Life', she sinks even lower in Ted's estimation. Wielding what little remaining power she had, she "insisted" on saying what she had to say (and nothing more) and "she bowed so low" that Ted was obliged "to kneel" and bow his face to her, as if in homage. He saw, then, that her face (again, her persona is suggested by this word) "seemed tinier than ever". And it was this smallness (of heart and of person) which filled him with "graveyard" heaviness as he listened. In the final three lines of the poem, Marianne Moore's age, her wrinkled smallness, her association in Ted's mind with graveyards and bats, all suggest an ambiguity in her search "for the grave" (Ted does not specify whose) "where she could lay down... ". But in the final line, it is the smallness and lack of generosity of Marianne Moore's posthumous offering to Sylvia which is emphasized by the awful finality of those last two words.

So, this is what the literary life amounts to. A quotidian scramble for fame and power amongst jealous and ungenerous people, many of whom judge by self-ordained and rigid standards and show no mercy or love in their final judgements. There is no equilibrium in such a competitive world and no Truth to be found in this way on this Path. Yet this was the Briatic pattern which took shape in Sylvia's life at that time and which remained a strong component of the inner drives which carried her (on the Wheel of Life and in this poem) to her grave.

Because of the dynamic, unstoppable momentum of the Wheel on the Path of Kaph, if the lessons of the earlier Paths have not been well learned then the course of events in the Yetziratic World may too easily reflect the negative energies of Chesed (self-righteousness, tyranny and gluttony: all of which were exhibited in 'The Literary Life') and of Netzach (habit, rigidity and selfishness).

Elm Tree pictureThis is exactly what happens in 'Setebos' (BL 132-3), where Ted's use of Shakespeare's mythic and magical drama, *The Tempest*, reinforces the sense that uncontrollable forces governed his and Sylvia's lives in the early months of 1962. This was the time when Sylvia wrote 'Elm' (SPCP 192-3) and the time when, as Ted describes in 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals', her Ariel voice "emerged in full" in her poetry and subsequently "never faltered again" (WP 188).

In retrospect, as he wrote *Birthday Letters*, Ted saw this as a critical time in both their lives. So critical, in fact, that he created an especially strong ritual drama¹¹ in 'Setebos' in order to re-create the events within a protective, potentially healing, Cabbalistic framework. Setebos, the devil-god consort of Shakespeare's great witch, Sycorax, in *The Tempest*, is another form of Lord Jagannath, Lord of the Universe, and it is under his name that the Whirlings of this poem take place. Yet, it is Sycorax, "who, with age and envy / Was grown into a hoop" (*The Tempest* Act 1. Scene II) whose magic prevails.

In 'Setebos', Ted used The Tempest rather differently to the way in which he describes Shakespeare's use of it in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being. He allotted the role of Prospero, for example, to Sylvia's mother: but she only "played" the part and he limited her use of magic to the staging of "the Masque". This is appropriate, since it is the Mother Goddess, Juno, who in The Tempest's Masque blesses the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand, just as Aurelia Plath participated in the blessing of the marriage at her daughter's wedding. Aurelia's magic in 'Setebos', however, is unlike Prospero's in every other way. She did not rescue Ted from any storm, only paid for "a new wardrobe" which he (perhaps seeing this as an attempt to renovate him as well as his clothes - to give him a new mask) declined to wear. Nor did she have any control over his and Sylvia's lives after their wedding. She did accompany them to Paris, and Ted describes her smiling at her reflection on the dark wall there, as if at her shadow cast by the glow of her daughter's happiness. But already she seemed to be a dark presence "eavesdropping" on the edge of their lives, just as she remained thereafter, hearing and seeing only shadowy reflections of the real situation, mostly through the letters Sylvia wrote to her.

In Ted's adaptation of The Tempest, who else but Sylvia and he could have played Miranda and Ferdinand? Ted saw Shakespeare's young lovers as dramatized versions of Venus and Adonis, symbols of perfect, heavenly love, and for him and Sylvia in those first months "It was like that", as he says, and emphatically repeats. It was a magical time, full of the sort of "voices and sounds and sweet airs" with which Shakespeare's magic island was filled. Ariel, too, "entertained" them. Ariel, who in Ted's analysis of The Tempest was the "agent" of Sycorax's power, a "flower spirit" and a "storm spirit", with magic of his own which was weaker than that of Sycorax but was "at the end of the register opposite the black" and had the power to transform her spirit into "verbal poetry". Ted calls Ariel a "poetic daemon" of the Great Goddess – one who accomplishes her ends. At the time he and Sylvia married, Ariel's "aura" found expression in their lives and in their poetry: but Ariel was always an unreliable and Mercurial trickster.

Caliban, too, in Ted's analysis was a "poetic daemon" of the Goddess (SGCB 478), although his "genetic make-up" (as Ted calls it) and his nature are darker and more earthy than Ariel's. Nevertheless, he transmitted poetic inspiration of the Dionysian kind (SGCB 465 - 8), showing Ted and Sylvia "the sweetest, the freshest, the wildest", in a secret, mutual love. The closeness of Ariel and Caliban in lines 12 to 20 of 'Setebos', demonstrates their kinship and combines their energies – light and dark; air and earth. And all these energies culminate in "Sycorax" (the name set alone at the end of the line), thus bringing both the Hag Goddess's daemons back to her and demonstrating her power, even as she hovers "at the horizon", off-stage "in the wings" of Sylvia's and Ted's lives.

That Sycorax was "the rind" of the "emptied quince" in Ted's and Sylvia's "garden", suggests the Fall from Eden which overtakes them in the second part of the poem: the quince (like Eve's apple) had been savoured; together in their new poetic life they had begun to search for knowledge and enlightenment; and, secretly, they had loved

Caliban, the earthy child of the Serpent Goddess, Sycorax. She, “the rind” of that quince, sat like the Sphinx on the rim of the Wheel of Fortune which now carried them down into the dark, moonlit turmoil of the storm.

So Caliban, Shakespeare’s “Hag-seed”, “Moon-calf” monster, who speaks poetry when he promises to show all Nature’s treasures to his friends, “reverted to type” and became a lustful beast. And it was his animal “bellow” which, it seems, Ted heard in Sylvia’s voice when she spoke in the voice of the Elm and described “this dark thing”, full of “malignity” and snaky poisons, which inhabited her (‘Elm’ SPCP 192 - 3). In Sylvia’s poem, the Elm is a creature of the Moon, it has the feathered nature of the swine-crow Sycorax, and the snaky fury of Medusa: it was this awful Goddess’s energies which Ted heard and feared as he lay (like Shakespeare’s Ariel) in “the labyrinth of a cowslip” whilst her storm raged about them.

That Ted regarded both Caliban and Ariel as daemons of the Goddess, explains Caliban’s presence in the Elm in ‘Setebos’, although elsewhere Ted wrote of the voice which emerged from Sylvia’s ‘Elm’ as Ariel’s. Certainly Caliban’s dark, earthy energies inhabit the tunnel down which the Minotaur approaches. His “bellow” and his “murderous music” are those of an emerging monster. Caliban’s thunder and his “black downpour” join Ariel’s lightning in the tempest which begins to rage in ‘Setebos’ and this turmoil matches in suddenness and power the way in which Sylvia’s new poetic voice emerged from the Elm in 1962.

In ‘Sylvia Plath and her Journals’ (WP 186-8), Ted wrote that after *The Bell Jar* was written in 1959, there was little sign of Ariel in Sylvia’s poems until “September, October and November of 1961”, when Ariel’s voice appeared, “still swaddled in old mannerisms” and “hardly more than a whisper”. Then, “quite suddenly”, “the ghost of her father reappear[ed]” (in ‘Little Fugue (SPCP 187 - 9)) and in April 1962 Sylvia wrote three poems, “unique in her work”, which he believed “enabled her to take the next step”. A few days later, in ‘Elm’ (dated 17 April, 1962), “the Ariel voice emerged in full out of the tree. From that day on it never faltered again”.

All of this was so sudden that Ted, not knowing exactly what was happening, saw the ghost of Otto reappear and saw, too, in ‘Event’ (SPCP 194), the “groove of old faults, deep and bitter” being “rehearsed”. Later, he wrote that in spite of the creative rebirth which had already taken place for Sylvia with *The Bell Jar*, she had still to deal with “the Other” – the deathly woman”, the one she called the “sick one” and confronted so vividly in her poem, ‘The Other’ (SPCP 201 - 2). And he wrote that after ‘Elm’: “Ariel was doing the very thing it had been created and liberated to do. In each poem, the terror is encountered head on, and the angel is mastered and brought to terms.” (WP 188). At the time, however, Ted lay in his own labyrinth “without a clue” whilst the resulting storm and confusion surrounded them both. He no longer knew what direction their lives would take: he had lost the thread of the story and could not determine “which play” they were now in.

Ariel had created the tempest which now ensued, and Caliban’s dark moon-calf

energies could be heard in the Minotaur; but Otto, now, was King Minos demanding sacrifices, and Sylvia was the maiden screaming as if being “roasted” inside a bronze bull. The confusion of plays and the confusion of characters (linked by Sylvia’s and Ted’s poems, where Otto = King Minos = The Minotaur = Sylvia circling “in a ring / a groove of old faults, deep and bitter”) is now part of the great storm in which they are marooned in ‘Setebos’. Ted’s poetry, here, is powerful – full of the energies of a great bull god and the stormy laughter of his consort, Sycorax. The Moon, which is as much a symbol of Diana / Venus, Goddess of Love as it is of Hecate / Sycorax, Goddess of Hell, is both “off her moorings / Tossed in tempest” and a horned thing plunging and tossing. And in the rapid movement and close linkage of words and lines, Sylvia and Ted (who at the beginning of the poems were cast as Miranda and Ferdinand / Venus and Adonis) become lost and stranded: Ted’s ship is unreachable, off its moorings, like the moon, and he cannot find Sylvia but hears her “bellowing” songs of dismemberment and death.

The line, “who has dismembered us?”, points us again to Sylvia’s poem, ‘Event’, written just a month after ‘Elm’. In it, already, love has disappeared, the woman circles in a groove worn by habit around old and bitter faults, and the couple lie “back to back” and “touch like cripples”. Clearly Ted read Sylvia’s poems at that time and heard the struggle within them, but in ‘Setebos’ he describes how he heard, too, the danger in them for himself. So the confusion in ‘Setebos’ continues. Now he is both Caliban and Actaeon – the monster and the hero. Having worked with Sylvia towards her poetic rebirth, having watched her strip off her masks and seen her soul-naked, he, like Actaeon, had seen the Love Goddess naked and would suffer the inevitable consequences of her wrath.

But in ‘Setebos’, the play is still dominated by *The Tempest*. So, Sycorax hurled Prospero’s head at Ted¹², symbolically overturning Prospero’s powers and using them against him. And, “hugging tight” what he could of his own nature and abilities, Ted crawled, as Caliban did in the storm in Act II Scene II, “under a gaberdine”, hearing the cry of the spirit hounds which Sycorax / Prospero and Ariel (through Sylvia’s poetry) had released against him¹³. So the Wheel of Fortune turned, and both of them were subjected to the tempest which its Whirlings engendered.

Following Ted’s arguments in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, it should be noted in particular that he interprets lightning as the flash of enlightenment descending the Tree of Life in Cabbala; Ariel as ‘Lion of God’ / ‘Flame of God’ – “the thunder and lightning of the Divine Source”; the cowslip as a symbol of Adonis’s death and rebirth; and a severed head as the birth of a new, spiritual consciousness. With this in mind, it is possible to see ‘Setebos’ as marking an important step in Ted’s own journey to spiritual rebirth, as well as marking the Jungian “alchemical individuation” of Sylvia’s “self” which he traces in ‘Sylvia Plath and her Journals’. Certainly, the second part of ‘Setebos’ describes in mythological terms the tyranny and the victory of the negative energies which drove Sylvia along this particular Cabbalistic Path. It describes, too, the turmoil which she and Ted actually lived through shortly before they began to live and write apart.

'Brasilia' (BL 178) on the Path of Kaph in the World of Assiah, refers, of course, to Sylvia's poem of the same title (SPCP 258 - 9). The imagery and symbolism of both poems serve to express a deep concern with the steely, dispiriting effects of "the power, the glory", and Sylvia's poem may be seen as a terrible, prophetic vision of a soul-less future society and a prayer for the survival of her child. Ted's poem, however, goes further and shows the fulfilment of that vision after Sylvia's death, but with Sylvia again seen as the heartless, judgemental goddess of the Alpha universe into which she fell in 'Telos' (BL 176 - 7). Both poems are about the destruction of spiritual vision by materialistic, bureaucratic powers: which is exactly what happened in the City of Brasilia.

Brasilia picture In 1883, a saintly Italian priest, Don Giovanni Bosco of Turin, had a vision that a great civilization would be born "between the 15th and 20th parallels, where a lake had formed". There had already been an idea in Brazil that one day a central, inland capital might be built to unite the Brazilian empire, but it was not until 1922 that Don Bosco's vision was acted on and a symbolic cornerstone was laid. The eventual completion of the capital, however, had more to do with politics than with spiritual vision. In 1960, the City of Brasilia was inaugurated by Juscelino Kubitschak, who had been elected President on a promise to complete Brazil's new capital within his term of office: Brasilia was built in just "two thousand days to be the nation's focus of power"¹⁴. It was an ultra-modern, 'ideal' city but, in the rush to complete it, the human aspect had been forgotten: plans for pedestrian precincts were abandoned in favour of unrestricted movement for cars; buildings were huge and impersonal; and few of the thousands of labourers (the "candangos") who came from all over Brazil to build it, could afford to live in it¹⁵. It was Bruno Giorgi's much photographed statue, "Os Candangos", which became the source of the steely, super-people in Sylvia's poem.

The steel helmet which Sylvia wears in Ted's poem, however, had a different source. It links Sylvia, again, with the Goddess Athena in her war-like role of guardian of civic order and fierce representative of her mother, Themis, Goddess of Justice and Law. The "court" was Themis's / Athena's "arena", and the "blade of lightning" which "descended" and "dazzled" was hers, too. But there is also a strong Cabbalistic element in this expression of Athena's / Sylvia's "great love" in this poem. The Hebrew word, Kaph, when it is used as a verb, means "subdue"; and in Talmudic teaching it is used to express the awful and repressive power with which the great love of the Divine is sometimes shown to his people. When this kind of Divine power is transmitted through a human agent, Kaph comes to mean the Fatherly "fist" of enforcement, rather than the benevolent "palm" of blessing. This kind of powerful subjection through love, is also one kind of 'Victory' (fuelled by the energies of Netzach) over the warring elements of the unconscious which are dealt with on this Path. Such a victory, too, may be reinforced by the Qlippoth of Chesed, which is 'Ideology'.

Athena picture In Sylvia's case, the ideology which drove her was the requirement of perfection in herself¹⁶, but also in those who most loved her and whom she most loved. So, "the three sentences" she delivered out of her "great love" destroyed her father (or

the Colossus she had made of him); her mother (who was “amazed” and staggered by Sylvia’s attacks on her in *The Bell Jar*, and in her poems and journals); and Ted and those closest to him (“me and mine” has a double meaning). All three were beheaded - made powerless in Sylvia’s arena: but Aurelia and Ted survived, although terribly wounded. Ironically, the “flunkies” (the word has implications of toadying and sycophancy) who acted as Sylvia’s servants and “carried out” of the arena the men who loved her (but, notably, not her mother), are probably the same people who “every day since” have maintained Sylvia’s “Empire” and set their own “effigies” of her up on “plinths”. Ted does not spell this out in the poem, nevertheless, it is another example of the destructive disequilibrium which radical ideological beliefs can cause.

In the final section of the poem, Ted’s sudden move from one country to another and from one mythology to another puts Sylvia’s actions into a much broader, more universal, framework. Tenochtitlan was the great city of the Aztecs on which Mexico City now stands. It was created on a site described by the god, Huitzilopochtli, in a dream which was granted to one of the Aztec leaders; and for nearly two-hundred years its floating gardens, canals, temples and palaces were the centre of a rich, powerful and bloody society, Huitzilopochtli, The Portentous One, was the Aztec version of Lord Jagannath. He was responsible for the cycles of nature and the fate of his people. Human sacrifices were made to him daily, in order to ensure that he retained supremacy over the gods of night and darkness with whom he fought each night; and his priests taught the people that such sacrifices were essential to the harmony of the city. His mother was Coatlicue, the terrible goddess of Earth (who was mother, too of the Moon Goddess, Coyolxauhqui, and the Star-gods, the Centzon-huitznahuc) but his powers in Tenochtitlan were displayed in a powerful economic and political system.

In 1519, when Cortez and his Spanish soldiers first came to Tenochtitlan, they were horrified by the pagan ideology they found there. But it was not until 1521 that they managed to destroy the temples and idols, kill the Aztec king, and establish their own Catholic religion. Love and worship of one god was replaced by love and worship of another, and thousands of those who worshipped each god were sacrificed for this great love. The “motherly wraith”, Coatlicue the Mother Goddess whose children were devoured in this conflict, wailed through the city at night, like the mothers and children whose wailing was heard on what came to be known as the “Night of Sorrow” after Cortez’s first attack.

So, in Ted’s poem, Sylvia’s effigies cry out, just as her poem ‘*Brasilia*’ cries out, at this sacrifice of human spirit – “the dove’s annihilation” – in this demonstration of power and glory. And so, in *Brasilia*, in Tenochtitlan, and in Sylvia’s own life, a visionary dream of being reborn in harmony at the Centre – which is also the heart of the Empire; the Centre of Being; the centre of the Tree; and the still, stable, hub of the Wheel – was made soul-less by the unbalanced expression of the great power of love in the hands of an unwise and unenlightened individual. In every case, caught up by the unstoppable momentum of events, ordinary people were sacrificed.

This was the danger which Sylvia saw in her poem, ‘*Brasilia*’, but which she did not

manage to avoid in her own life. She became an icon in her own Empire. Yet, her “dry-eyed” effigies and her tearless portraits – those images of herself and others which she created in her work – still stand as a memorial to her great endeavour. And, “every day”, around and through them (as in poems like her ‘Brasilia’) Sylvia’s ghost can be heard weeping and wailing like a motherly wraith, mourning all that has been sacrificed in the name of love.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The sphinx is generally depicted as a Fury-like creature with a woman’s head, a lion’s body and bat’s wings. In Greek iconography, she often appeared on Athena’s shield or helmet, so the sword she bears is also the Sword of Justice.
2. The English usage of ‘Juggernaut’ is said to derive from the great wooden Chariot (actually called ‘Nandighosh’) on which the carved image of Lord Jagannath is pulled through the town of Puri (in the Indian State of Orissa) during the annual Festival of Chariots (Ratha Yatra). Nandigosh is an immensely heavy wooden cart about ten metres tall and with sixteen huge wooden wheels. Great crowds attend this festival and, at one time, frenzied worshippers of Lord Jagannath would throw themselves under the wheels of Nandigosh, symbolically and literally sacrificing themselves to the unstoppable powers of the Deity. More information about Lord Jagannath, including the story of his relationship to Lord Krishna can be found at Sri Jaganath <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagannath>.
3. Marianne Moore (1887-1972). Her *Collected Poems* (1951) won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award (1952) and the Bollinger Prize (1953). Sylvia bought a copy and read it before meeting her at Mt. Holyoak College, where Miss Moore was one of the judges of the Glascok Poetry Competition. Sylvia, along with six other finalists, read her poems before the judges and she won the competition. (SPLH 16 April 1955).
4. Sylvia wrote to her brother, Warren, that she found Marianne Moore’s syllabic form “satisfactorily strict” because it had the “speaking illusion of freedom”. She also noted that a pattern which varied the number of syllables in each line “(... can be set up, as M. Moore does it)” (SPLH 11 June 1958).
5. Marianne Moore’s poetry was admired for its sharp, disciplined, highly intelligent and unusual style but some found it too coolly rational. She was renowned, too, for rewriting and republishing her old poems. Her last published version of ‘Poetry’ reduced it from thirty-eight lines to four.
6. The “wire” with which she embroiders is made of “phosphor-bronze”, which is an amalgam. It is stiff and brittle and easily broken – far removed from the soft, malleability and beauty of gold thread.
7. Moore, ‘Poetry’, *The Penguin Book of American Verse*, Penguin, 1977, p. 345.

8. Sylvia had also sent Marianne Moore a copy of 'Moonrise' (SPCP 98).

9. Dante, The Inferno, Canto V and Canto VI.

10. 'Ocean 1212-W' (JPBD 117 - 124). In his Introduction to Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams, Ted describes this is one of three "journalistic pieces" "written during the time of the Ariel poems". But he makes it clear that Sylvia's reputation "rests on the poems of her last six months", not on her prose.

11. Ted's own complex and detailed discussion of the use of ritual drama is found throughout Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being but, especially, in 'Two Kinds of Ritual Drama' (SGCB 105 - 108). The ritual drama of 'Setebos' is of the second, "manipulative" kind.

12. In Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, Ted writes that in mystical tradition, "In general, beheading means to be reborn with a new, other, consciousness" (SGCB 395).

13. Just as Prospero and Ariel set their spirit hounds on Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano in Act IV, Scene 1 of The Tempest.

14. This phrase is taken from a modern travel brochure.

15. The efforts of these thousands of labourers were recognized by UNESCO in 1987, when Brasilia was declared a 'Heritage of Mankind'.

16. In a "Diary Supplement" quoted by Aurelia Plath, Sylvia wrote: "Never, never, never will I reach the perfection I long for with all my soul". (SPLH 40).

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalStrength cardLamed path
The Path of Strength – Lamed

Tarot card 11. Tree path 12.

Joining Sephiroth 5 (Gevurah) and 6 (Tiphereth).

'God Help the Wolf after Whom the Dogs Do Not Bark', 'The Bird', 'A Short Film', 'The Cast'.

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The Path of Lamed is one of the most important paths on the Cabbalistic Tree. Like some earlier paths, it leads the journeyer back to the heart of the Tree and to the revelations of Tiphereth, but its occult significance and its closeness to the Divine Mystery of enlightenment is such that much of its Cabbalistic meaning remains hidden. Only initiates who have been suitably prepared and have experienced the Mystery may know the secrets.

All who approached the Mystery at Eleusis, for example, were required to have certain knowledge and to undergo special rituals. The revelation of the Mystery "opened their eyes" and they were enlightened, but the exact nature of that mystical revelation was so secret that still, after some two-and-a-half thousand years, it remains unknown. We know that the worshippers purified themselves in the sea and made a ritual sacrifice to the Goddess Demeter, and that their journey to the Sanctuary was made with much ceremony, with dance and with the cry, "Iacchus!". Enlightenment, which marked initiation, was different for each individual. But, in any case, a vow of secrecy protected the Divine Mystery.

The same is true of many Cabbalistic, Hermetic, Alchemical and Magical associations, where to break the vow of secrecy is regarded (metaphorically) as the death of the initiate. Aleister Crowley, an initiate of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, therefore wrote of the Path of Lamed and the Tarot card of Strength in riddles, and in exhortations with obscure references to "rapture and vigour", "ecstasy" and "grave mysteries":

"Beauty and strength, leaping laughter and delicious languor, force and fire, are of us."
"I am the Snake that giveth Knowledge and Delight and bright glory, to stir the hearts of men with drunkenness..."

"Love one another with burning hearts..."

More plainly, he describes this card as "the most powerful of the Zodiacal cards, [it] represents the most critical of all the operations of magick and of alchemy". (The Book of Thoth 92).

Ted certainly knew Crowley's works; and obscure as Crowley's interpretation of this path is, there are magical elements of it which may well lie behind the Birthday Letters poem, 'God Help the Wolf after Whom the Dogs Do Not Bark' (BL 26-7), which is the poem on the Path of Lamed in the Atziluthic World. Sylvia's dancing and her great capacity for love pervade this poem, but the framing reference to the "mystery of hatred" in the first and last lines associates her with that same paradox of hatred which was aroused by the Divine love of those figures of religious Mysteries to whom Crowley refers – Osiris, Horus, Dionysus, Guatama Buddha and Christ. Ted's purpose, it seems, was not to suggest that Sylvia herself was such a figure but that, as he writes in 'The

God' (BL 188 - 191), she was like "a religious fanatic", driven to offer to others that spiritual energy and that spark of Divine love which she carried within her.

Crowley's explanatory notes for this particular card and Path also throw some light on the obscure second line of Ted's poem: "After your billion years in anonymous matter". Clearly this cannot literally refer to Sylvia, although it might be thought to refer to The Goddess and (as in other Birthday Letters poems) to Sylvia's embodiment of her. Crowley's notes support this interpretation. Following an explanation of "the magical doctrine of the succession of Aeons, which is connected with the procession of the Zodiac", Crowley refers to a belief that our present Aeon is that in which "the Beast and the Scarlet Woman... of the Apocalypse" will appear. The Scarlet Woman is part of Zodiacal time and space – part of the billion years of anonymous matter. She is The Goddess. Crowley identifies her as "The Great Mother" and as "Love", and he associates her with "the mystery of Dionysus Zagreus". But she was revealed by St. John the Divine as "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH [sic.]" ('the Revelation' 17:5), and she, too, was "promptly hated".

If all this seems too esoteric or far-fetched, then it may be noted that Crowley also offers a more common explanation for the figure on the card of Strength, identifying her as the Moon Goddess, the Female essence represented in human form and shown in control of a wolf, or some other wild beast, which represents the animal passions within us.

The Cabbalistic meditations for this Path of Lamed¹ are 'The Woman justified' and 'By Equilibrium and Self Sacrifice is the Gate'. And, just as the figure on the card is female, the Path of Lamed is specifically associated in the Mysteries with Woman (with Demeter and Persephone, with the Shekinah, and with the Scarlet Woman) and with the relationship between human and Divine energies. At this stage of the journey, the Male energies of the previous Path are given form in the Divine passions embodied in the Female which, through the strength and judgement derived from Sephira 5 (Gevurah), may be brought into equilibrium at Sephira 62. Through control will come enlightenment and a rebirth which will release the Initiate's full potential. But Lamed, the Ox-goad, indicates that the necessary strength for rebirth on this path will only be learned through the prick of pain.

In some respects, one approaching initiation on this Path is still the Fool and, so, may express his or her passions too freely. And uncontrolled passions, and especially uncontrolled love, commonly bring exploitation, abuse, censure, rejection, jealousy and hatred to the Foolish. The sorrow which results from this is the spur of pain, the ox-goad, which should teach understanding and restraint. But control of the Wolf energies is not an easy or comfortable lesson to learn.

Such is the Cabbalistic background to 'God Help the Wolf after Whom the Dogs Do Not Bark'.

The original title for this poem was 'A Little Touch of Timon'³, which suggests that Ted initially wanted to make an analogy between Shakespeare's Timon (of Timon of Athens) and the hatred which his generosity and love eventually aroused in those who received it, and Sylvia and the "mystery of hatred" which she meets in this poem. But the title under which the poem now appears in Birthday Letters is a parable, akin to a response Ted once made to Daniel Weissbort who was commiserating with him over the "outcry" his every move provoked, and over the way "The Scholars band together / fortifying the narrow view": "Pity the man", Ted muttered, "whom all men love"⁴.

Wolf picture Wolves have a long history in myth, folk-lore and religion, of representing the animal passions in human beings⁵ and, as I discuss in 'Wolf Masks'⁶, Ted's belief in the essential value of such wolf-energies and in the need for them in our world and in us was constantly expressed in his work. The Wolf in Sylvia, then, was the energies which she embodied and which, as her journals often show, she expressed too freely and needed to learn to control. But these same energies were what drove her to seek her true Self through her poetic Self: without them she would have achieved nothing. So, Sylvia's Wolf needed to be controlled but not subdued to the extent that it lost its wolfishness: its energies were "the gifts" with which she "tried [her] utmost to reach and touch" others, and they were essential to her quest. But the dogs which barked after her, were those people to whom she felt closest: people whose responses to her shaped her self-image, and whose disapproval and hatred caused her the most pain.

At first, in the poem, Sylvia's gift of love is seen as childishly (Foolishly) indiscriminate – as something which she gave passionately to "every visitor to the house". Then, child-like, she dances as if to keep her father alive with her love; as if her own spirit could "sweeten" and tame his bitterness and be part of his death. Her failure to keep him alive, or to join him in death, is then seen as a complete loss of self: where once there was anger and bitterness which required her sweetening dance, there was now nothing but silence. Her sorrow drove her to find a new self – a new reason for dancing - but her sense of emptiness and loss became a panic over loss of time in that very search.

'God help the Wolf...' takes up and elaborates on Sylvia's search for Self, and it is useful to read of Ted's own concept of the poetic Self and a poet's search for that Self in the essay which he wrote in 1988 as a tribute to T.S. Eliot. The essay was originally titled A Dancer to God (Faber, 1992), and in it Ted traces in Eliot's work a spiritual quest driven by the passionate Divine spark of Eliot's inner poetic double. Not only does the essay's title reflect the image of Sylvia's dancing which dominates 'God Help the Wolf...', but Ted's statement in the essay that "we live in the translation, where what had been religious and centred in God is psychological and centred on the idea of self – albeit a self which remains a measureless question mark" is also very applicable to Sylvia; and his poem ends with her still "floundering", still trying to "save" herself, still trying to answer that very question.

As usual, Ted's poem refers to actual events in Sylvia's life. In her journal on 20th September 1952, Sylvia, examining her own psychology, asked herself: "Is not my first

desperate rush of enthusiasm (remarked upon formerly by Dick) a vestige of my old fear of people running away, leaving me, forcing me to be alone?" [Sylvia's underlining]. "Is it not a device subconsciously calculated to interest, to hold, to retain my partner, be it male or female?". Pained by memories of childhood incidents, she recognized her own desperate need for recognition and vowed "to cultivate restraint". But her desperate attempts at "self-preservation" and "mask"-wearing (SPJ 3 Nov. 1952)) at this time, ended in deep depression and her attempted suicide a few months later.

At Cambridge University, Sylvia hoped all would "begin again" and that she would be "happier than ever before" (LH 3 Oct. 1955). She hoped, too, to publish her poems and be accepted there as "a literary citizen" (LH 5 Oct. 1955). But although she saw and listened to poets and writers whom she admired, her early reverence for the age and learning of the place soon gave way to a disillusioned view of the women students and, in particular, the women dons. More than anything else, in a place where she had expected to be amongst equals in her ability and her desire for learning, she met hostility and rejection from her fellow students, attacks on her poems from fellow poets and, towards the end of her time at Cambridge University, "a devastating and destructive attack" from "a very nasty young don" who singled out her poem for "particularly vicious abuse" (LH 8 June 1957). He or she did so, as Ted notes in his poem, by comparing Sylvia with John Donne – a move which Sylvia thought "typical of Cambridge criticism" and which Ted suggests was a response to the threat which Sylvia's energies and ability posed to the established but fragile order of "The Colleges".

Marsilio Ficino, the Renaissance Hermeticist whose work on poetic frenzy and spiritual magic Ted knew well, also wrote parables about "impious slanderers"⁷. He, too, knew that "our Academy has its dogs" and that "Those who wisely search for truth modestly hold onto some discovery. The others bark for the sake of public opinion, and bite and tear"⁸. In Ted's poem, Sylvia suffered the "contempt" and the "homeopathic" teaching of those who tried to make her like themselves: those who, like Ficino's "wise dogs" of the Academy, "wear out their lives" on "tiny matters" of "studies and business". Sylvia was certainly pained by their sharp medicine, their "derision" and their "mud", and she did not understand their hatred. But her letters show that from her earliest days at Cambridge she saw and rejected the "grotesque[]" narrowness of their lives: "their experience is secondary", she wrote of the dons, "and this to me is tantamount to a kind of living death". She vowed to "move into the world of growth and suffering where the real books are people's minds and souls" (LH 22 Nov. 1955). Luckily, the happiness of love and marriage helped to keep Sylvia's Wolf energies intact and she learned to bear the pain of the hostility she encountered and to direct her energies towards her own particular quest. For the time being, "the mystery of that hatred" had been acknowledged and accepted as "very trying", but Sylvia had learned to control her energies, to "prepare a face to meet a face", and she had successfully completed her journey through Cambridge. She was ready to start a new life, to be reborn (so-to-speak), in the "Promised Land" of America (LH 8 June 1957. Just such a rebirth, on this particular Path, is totally in keeping with the archetypal, mythical nature of enlightenment and rebirth which follows the questing Fool's desperate, floundering dance in the Atziluthic World.

'the Bird' (BL 77-9), which is the poem on this Path in the World of Briah, is full of the energies of Gevurah. It is also a beautiful and careful Alchemy.

As with 'The Blue Flannel Suit' (BL 67-8) and 'Child's Park' (BL 69-70), both of which received Gevurah's energies on earlier Briatic Paths (Cheth and Teth), 'The Bird' deals with Gevurah's power to preserve and destroy Form, especially those patterns of life and thought which shaped the way Ted and Sylvia pursued their quest. Sylvia demonstrates, as before, Gevurah's 'Virtues' of courage and energy; and (on this Path) she joins the 'Spiritual Vision' of Gevurah, which is the 'Vision of Power', with the 'Virtue' of Tiphereth, which is 'Devotion to the Great Work'. The power which Sylvia sought, was power over the written word, but on this Path she needed to learn, too, that Gevurah's potential for violence may be expressed in the abuse of power and in the 'Vice' of Gevurah, which is cruelty.

In some ways, the title of Ted's poem refers to the baby bird which he and Sylvia found and which they tried to keep alive in their flat in Northampton (SPJ 4 - 9 July 1958). The analogy between that bird's desperate attempts to live and Sylvia's desperate attempts to find her Self through writing, is surely intended. In Ted's poem, however, Sylvia's "Panic Bird" is a far more abstract and symbolic creature, although its energies are real enough.

From mid-July 1958 until May 1959, Sylvia's journal refers often to her feelings of panic and to the "glassy coverlid" (12 July 1958) which seemed to prevent her from writing the stories she so much wanted to write. With great determination, she set out to change this pattern – to break out from "behind a glass-dome fancy-façade of numb dumb wordage" and to "speak from [her] true deep voice in writing" (19 Feb. 1959). But she believed that she would find this voice only in prose, not in poetry.

So, Sylvia's "Panic Bird" was the life-energies within her which fought for release. In 'The Bird', Ted feels them behind the invisible glass, and imagines them as the life energies "throbbing" in the throat of a gecko which is "glued against nothing". Gecko picture This is a strange image, but it is very like the Alchemists' image of the Mercurial Salamander (which looks like a large gecko) inside the alchemical flask, where it burns in Sulphurous fires. The parallel between the vitriolic Alchemical purification of Mercury (the Life-Spirit which is supported by, and supports, the body) in Alchemy, and the violent, painful emotions Sylvia suffered in the process of self-determination, is apparent; as is the relationship of both to the Ox-goad of Lamed by which the quester is driven towards enlightenment.

But, although 'The Bird' deals with Sylvia's enlightenment, Ted, at that time, was trapped in the same glass vessel, sharing her journey "step for step". Both were caught up in a pattern of life in which they circled mechanically, like "A Tyrolean clockwork". Even in their contact with nature, Ted suggests they were "defective": walking round and round a municipal "Common", their bodies, hearts and minds unmoved and disconnected from the earth on which they trod, as if their feet swung only "from the

knees”.

As Ted made clear in poems like ‘The Blue Flannel Suit’ and ‘the Literary Life’, he and Sylvia had been following a conventional pattern and pursuing their quest in the wrong way. Their move to Boston was the first step in breaking that pattern. But they were still asleep, still in a Foolish dream world, still part of a fairy-tale, like characters in one of the Grimm brothers’ stories which Sylvia had set herself to translate from the German. Ted’s imagery suggests that the fairy story was Rapunzel. And Sylvia “The Princess”, did let her hair down, literally and metaphorically. No longer needing to dress up for work, she wrote of “our splayed selves” (SPJ 27 Sept. 1958) and of her “untrained” hair (SPJ 7 Jan. 1959); and she tried to earth herself and her writing in “a sturdy-shoed, slow-plodding common sense program” (SPJ 12 July 1958) and to write about “THINGS OF THE WORLD WITH NO GLAZING” [her capitals] (SPJ 20 May 1959).

Maybe Sylvia did tell Ted everything but “the fairy tale” (which Ted does not name): she certainly began at that time to question their closeness and to keep some things from him (cf. SPJ 26 Dec. 1958). Most likely, however, she did not know which fairy tale they were in. Only in retrospect (perhaps only as he wrote this poem), can Ted have seen the pattern of their lives and seen how strangely the imagery of Rapunzel fits this pattern. Rapunzel, like his “Princess” and (metaphorically) like Sylvia, was trapped in a high tower with a “solitary window”. Nightly, she let her long hair “right down to the ground” so that the witch⁹ who kept her there, and later the Prince, could climb up to her. The Prince, when he was eventually discovered by the witch, threw himself from the window, was blinded by thorns, and spent many years wandering blindly in the woods lamenting the loss of his beloved.

But Sylvia did have another, private, fairy story. She, too, was blindly searching the woods for her lost beloved – her father - believing that to “recover” him (‘Daddy’, SPCP 222) would help her to find her Self. He was Sylvia’s Colossus and her “bullman.../King” (‘Poem for a Birthday’, SPCP 134). But this, too, was a “fairy tale”: a distraction from the true Way to enlightenment.

In ‘The Bird’, Ted’s linking of the fairy tale with his and Sylvia’s exactly parallel journeys, and with his own sleep-walking in Sylvia’s dream, suggests the dream-like nature of the pattern which held them. An Alchemist, Cabbalist or NeoPlatonist would recognize this as the dream in which all unenlightened mortals live, seeing only shadows on the cave wall; but the throb of energy in the Mercurial gecko and Sylvia’s contact with “the ground” on this Path which is identified by the numbers 11 and 12, would suggest a readiness for change. And the word “wake” in line 17 of the poem presages such a change in Sylvia.

What happens, in an Alchemist’s terms, is a process called ‘Congelation’, in which the Spirit “which dreadeth not fire”¹⁰ flies up from the Salt Body (the ‘sal’ of ‘salamander’), its “matter is made perfectly white”, and it then congeals again in the flask in malleable or meltable form, like wax or snow. In ‘The Bird’, the whiteness of the “ice-caked ship”, the “lacy crystals”, the salt from which the ship is lifted and the salt-tears which

“clogged” Sylvia’s “eyelashes”, all suggest this Congelation. So, too, does the “charred” apartment block which is left by the “flame-race upwards” (just as a blackened residue is left in the bottom of the Alchemist’s flask), and the congealed “frozen suds” left “like a solid Niagra” when the process ends. The “weltering blood” which follows in Ted’s poem is also part of the Congelation, where Spirit is recombined with Body (earth) in a bloody menstruum ready to be ‘Dissolved and Coagulated’ by fire, again and again, until it is pure. Coagulation is one form of rebirth but it is not the end of the journey.

In spite of these alchemical parallels, ‘The Bird’ is not an abstract alchemy. The materials with which Ted was working when he wrote the poem were distillations of Sylvia’s own creative spirit – her journals and, in particular, the poems and stories which she wrote when they were living in Boston. Sylvia’s poem, ‘A Winter Ship’ (SPCP 112 - 113) describes nothing as delicate and fantastic as the “wedding vessel” in ‘The Bird’, but both poems echo the bleakness of parts of Coleridge’s *The Ancient Mariner*. Sylvia’s ship is skeletal, “iceribbed”, an “albatross of frost” in a “glassy pellicle”, and the whole poem is coldly full of decay and death which reflect her feelings of frozen energy and her depression. Yet it is a good poem, anchored in “the world with no glazing” just as Sylvia determined her writing should be. ‘Aftermath’ (SPCP 113 - 114), which was inspired by the house fire which Sylvia described in her journal (28 March 1958), is less earthed, but with its conjuring of Medea, the sorceress who had power over fire-breathing bulls, it, too, is an expression of Sylvia’s struggle for new energy; for “incident”; for “carnage” even; and of the frustration she felt and which is expressed in Ted’s poem by the dark screen and Sylvia’s soundless howl.

“What glowed into focus” (as Ted puts it), through Sylvia’s determination and persistence in the midst of all this turmoil, was her story, ‘The Fifteen-Dollar Eagle’ (JPBD 59 - 73)¹¹, which Ted collected amongst the “more successful stories” in *Johnny Panic* and the *Bible of Dreams*.

This was not the only story Sylvia wrote at that time but it is one which shows considerable skill, and it does glow with humour and life. It is also very suitable for Ted’s symbolic purposes, because of the double nature of the American Eagle¹² and of Sylvia’s American – German background. Feeling her energies trapped, Sylvia longed to “Forget self and give blood to creation” (SPJ 28 Feb. 1959), which is exactly what she saw happen at the tattoo shop, where an eagle was born in blood on a sailor’s arm. Her own “Panic Bird”, meanwhile, remained trapped. Determination, willpower, courage, violence, love and sorrow – all the energies of Gevurah and Tiphereth drove her search for Self at that time, and through her sessions with Ruth Beuscher she explored her American – German childhood and her relationship with her parents. She also visited her father’s grave at Winthrop. But although she achieved small flights of imaginative freedom (rather like the out-of-body experience of the narrator in ‘The Fifteen-Dollar Eagle’, who faints at the sight of the blood) still something prevented her complete creative rebirth.

Ted’s vision (which could be dream or memory) in lines 45 - 57 of ‘The Bird’, defines his and Sylvia’s situation and suggests the nature of the problem. Firstly, they “stood

married”: stood, as if stalled by their attempts to share, completely, a quest which can only be made by each individual person for themselves. The “Cambridge College” in which they stood could have been in Cambridge, England, or Cambridge, Massachusetts, although it would have been the latter at this time¹³. Both espoused similar values, and both attracted people with similar aims and lifestyles to their “packed” rooms to drink College “sherry”. Both, like Ficino’s “Academies” had, and probably still have, their own “dogs” who expect conformity with their particular ways of living. Ted symbolized this way of life in these lines as the unimaginative accumulation of money for “booze”: suggesting the lack of imagination by the “chunky” nature of the tumbler and the base metal nature of “coins”, and using the slang term “booze” to describe the lack of quality in the thing to which they donated their time and money.

In the 13 lines which describe Ted’s vision, the explosion of this coarse tumbler creates the sudden whiteness and the “infinitely tiny” crystals of snow which represent the completed Alchemical Congelation which must precede any rebirth. The message for him, and especially for Sylvia whose Spirit with its potential for rebirth was trapped in a glass vessel shaped by her American College goals and experiences¹⁴, was clear: this pattern (this Form) had to be destroyed before the perfect crystalline seed of rebirth could be made. But one other thing is clear in these lines: the complete destruction of the pattern and the true Congelation is not brought about by willpower but by some explosive external force¹⁵. So, although Ted and Sylvia again changed their way of life, leaving Boston for a tour of Canada and the United States, living and working for two months at Yaddo artist’s colony, and then moving back to England, these changes, although a form of rebirth, were only preparation for the inner change Sylvia sought but which still eluded her.

Tragically, the final twelve lines of ‘The Bird’ show that in spite of Sylvia’s continued attempts to break the patterns of inherited values within herself (symbolized earlier in the poem by her smashing of a “mahogany heirloom table”), the Alchemical materials from which her rebirth eventually did occur were not pure enough. In spite of all her efforts, some essential lesson had not been learned¹⁶.

So, the infinitely tiny white crystals which were left when her “glass dome” did break in late 1962, were not the pure ‘diamond’ crystals of a true Alchemical transmutation, but impure, contaminated crystals of snow, “old” and “slabbed” like that which “barricaded London” in the winter of 1962-3. Again, this is an Alchemical image, for London was often used by Alchemists to represent the Fortress to which all Paths lead and which only those with a pure, enlightened Spirit can enter. Sylvia’s Spirit, the “bird” which was finally freed when the glass “vanished”, could not enter the Fortress because of this muddied snow. Instead, like the gecko, she was not yet pure, so she “fell into empty light”. Ted describes “the huge loose emptiness of light / Wheeling through everything”, and this phrase suggests both the absence and the omnipresence of light, and a vast feeling of turmoil, confusion and, particularly, “emptiness” (the word is twice repeated). Instead of the flight of the crystalline Spirit, which must eventually return to the Body to seed new life, Sylvia fell into what Cabbalists will recognize as the Void. Not only was the bird-gecko-Spirit gone, but so, too, was the glass dome which was the Alchemical

flask, the Body, which had supported it: together these were Sylvia¹⁷.

'A Short Film' (BL 134), which is the poem on the Path of Lamed in the World of Yetzirah, is a strange poem, seemingly quite out of context in the roughly chronological order of Birthday Letters. Suddenly, flanked by poems which refer to events early in 1962, we have a picture of Sylvia as a child; and, it seems, a meditation on the pains of memory, love and death.

Yet the image of Sylvia, ghostly, "made out of mist and smudge", not dancing but "skipping and still skipping", as if eternally driven by her trapped animal energies, makes a powerful and disturbing link with the ending of 'The Bird'. And part of the "horror" of this connection is the idea that Sylvia is still circling in the Void: that these "few frames" of film show not only the past but the present and future, too. Such a "long-term" projection is its "danger".

Other images used by Ted in the poem also make a connection with 'The Bird'. For the film acts as the outside power, the "electronic detonator", which links the image of Sylvia with that small spark of her Spirit which lies in the memory (in the "grave"/ cave / flask of the Body) of all those who loved her, and which causes the explosion of an idea: a sudden enlightenment which charges the nerves and causes the Body to "sweat". Such a sweat is, again, an Alchemical image of the Salt released from the Salamander by sulphurous purification.

Ted never used such imagery casually. So, what was his purpose here? Was he just using the powerful alchemical and magical energies of this Path to convey the agonizing experience of re-living the events which led to Sylvia's death – the "something which has already happened"? Was he purging himself through the Alchemy of this poem?: Certainly writing Birthday Letters was, amongst other things, a way of doing just that. Or was this a means by which Sylvia's Spirit could find continual rebirth in our world?: Hence his use of the word "us", which includes the reader in this Alchemy.

Perhaps, it was all of these things, and more. Certainly, this poem on this particular Path is concerned with the Mystery of rebirth. And there are still more Cabbalistic reasons for its imagery, which make the reason for its exact position in Birthday Letters sequence very clear.

One of the most important figures associated with Lamed is The Fool, Mercury, Pan. Aleister Crowley notes that on this Path there occurs "the comedy of Pan, that is played at night in the thick forest: And this is the mystery of Dionysus Zagreb" (Book of Thoth 138). On this Path, only a Fool will be open enough, child-like enough, to abandon all worldly goals and restraints and leave everything to the gods. Always, at this point, the quester must rely only on love and trust, and must already be strong enough to withstand the necessary exposure to Divine energies. Always it is dangerous.

In Cabbalistic numerology, the Fool, who is represented by 0, began the journey on Path 1. After completing Path 11, the journeyer's Tarot number is 10 and he or she has

completed the Worldly cycle of the upper Tree, and has become the Wise Fool who will encounter the Divine energies from Sephira 1: $10 + 1$ (The Fool + the Divine) = 11, the Tarot number of the journeyer on the Path of Lamed.

So, the image of Sylvia as a child “aged about ten”, suggests not only that she has completed her journey along the first ten Paths of the Tree but also that with the Strength of this Path, and with her energies undiminished, she is the vulnerable child-like Wise Fool approaching the Mystery at the Heart of the Tree (Tiphereth). Here, in the World of Yetzirah where Briatic patterns become fixed, between the tempests of ‘Setebos’ and the appearance of the serpentine, creative energies in ‘The Rag Rug’, Sylvia in ‘A Short Film’ is again a child. And, at this time in the roughly chronological sequence of Birthday Letters, Sylvia was, as Ted indicated in ‘Sylvia Plath and Her Journals’ (WP 182), ready “to take her first steps into independent life”: just like a ten-year-old child. Ted’s phrase metaphorically indicated Sylvia’s readiness for the great change which occurred when the Ariel voice was suddenly freed in her work, but it also indicated the coming separation of their Paths.

‘the Cast’ (BL 179 - 180) (a title which appropriately suggests an empty vessel or the discarded part of a creation) is the poem on this Path in the World of Assiah – the World of Shells or Qlippoth. And again, on this Path, Ted’s essay A Dancer to God (‘the Poetic Self’ (WP 268 - 292)) is important for an understanding of the poem. Of particular relevance, are Ted’s discussion of the “conflict of selves” and the “ordeal of parturition” which are undergone as the autonomous poetic Self and the closely related Divine Self separate from the ordinary Ego. Also important, is Ted’s perception of the presence of St. Sebastian and St. Narcissus as symbolic figures in T.S. Eliot’s quest; and the meaning of Eros, the god of Love (who is also Cupid, the mischievous son of Venus, wielder of the arrows of desire) in this questing context. All of these things find parallels in ‘The Cast’.

Narcissus picture

The very first word of ‘The Cast’ connects this poem with Sylvia’s poem ‘Daddy’ (SPCP 222-243), and Ted’s imagery conveys the cruel vitriolic anger which in Sylvia’s poem is publicly directed at her father. Sylvia’s words are sharp as stings and her accusations, like arrows, were designed “to kill”: in the poem, Sylvia makes this clear. Love, Eros, the passion which is essential to this Path and which, in ‘The Cast’ is described as the honey which Sylvia kept “for others”, was (Ted suggests) in the hands of that mischievous and tricky child, “Cupid”. And his arrows had been “modified” by the death-dealing horrors of the world: by the weapon makers of Peenemünde, where the ‘vergetungswaffe’ (meaning ‘reprisal weapon’), the guided V1 and V2 rocket missiles used in WWII, were developed; and by all the fantastic and horrible ways of dying invented by the human imagination and depicted in Breughel’s paintings¹⁸.

In ‘Daddy’, Sylvia conjured the spirit of her father by name; held him present throughout the poem with her repeated, accusatory “you”; and, like a spirit-banishing mantra, in the first and last lines of the poem, she stated her rejection of him. This was powerful word-magic.

Ted, in 'The Cast', shows Daddy as a "weightless", "voiceless", "lifeless" spirit who was, nevertheless, obliged to listen to Sylvia's list of grievances against him and was "helpless" against her attack. And he had to die: not like a vampire (although Sylvia did this, too, in her poem) but slowly, stood at the stake, exposed and humiliated for all to see. Significantly, Ted describes the image in which Sylvia enshrined this public and personal version of her Daddy as "the bronze of immortal poesy", as if she had cast it in bronze, a metal which has a fine, metallic sheen and will last for centuries but which has none of the softness and beauty of pure gold.

Yet, Sylvia's image of her father and of herself in 'Daddy' is quite different to Ted's image of them both in 'The Cast'. And in the word 'poesy', with its echo of the name of Poeas, Ted reinforces the meaning of his own imagery in 'The Cast', because Poeas (according to Robert Graves) was the ghost-double, the "tanist or other self" of Hercules. Poeas "lighted Hercules's pyre and inherited his arrows"; he was Hercules's successor; and it was said that he had fed on Hercules dead body (WG 126). In Ted's poem, Sylvia's father is seen as the necessary sacrifice through which she will be "healed"; but he is also an essential part of Sylvia herself, so, in ridding herself of him she necessarily bleeds: Sylvia, like Poeas, kills her other self, inherits her father's weapons (the stings of his bees) and uses his death to heal and sustain herself, thereby (metaphorically) feeding on him.

Sylvia's image of her father, however, reflected what he had become in her own mind, not necessarily what he had been in life. This was the psychological wound which had to be healed by love: this was the purification which had to take place before the true rebirth could happen. The pain which Sylvia felt because of her wound drove her to rid herself of it: just as "phagocytes" in the blood work to expel a "chunk of weapon" or a "shard of shrapnel" from the body; just as the ox-goad / Lamed drives the quester along this path; just as the poetic Self drives the ordinary Self to release it. The whole process, as Ted described it in his essay on T.S. Eliot, is one in which part of the poet's "ordinary personality" is "forcibly displaced", so that "that other speech and that other life", which is the poet's "true speech and life" can be released (WP 276). This is the shamanic poet's "crucial initiatory experience of visionary dismemberment" and it is full of danger. Yet, clearly, Ted believed that in the initiatory experience which Sylvia underwent on this path, her shamanic flight was guided by Cupid not Eros. Consequently, the "distorted statue", the poetic image of 'Daddy' with which she returned, was a Shell: it was a heartless, hollow image, animated by anger not love, and, because of that Sylvia's poetic rebirth, too, was hollow. What Ted perceived in 'Daddy', and what he described in 'the Cast', was not the image of Sylvia's father which she immortalized in her poem, but an image of Sylvia mortally wounding herself in this process.

Ted certainly believed that by December 1962 Sylvia had faced her "antagonist" and "overcome, by a stunning display of power, the bogies of her life" ('Sylvia Plath and her Journals', WP 188). He acknowledged her power and her success, noting that "the impression of growth and new large strength in her personality was striking". But he

saw, too, that at this stage in Sylvia's journey, on this particular Path, she showed none of the control, judgement or love necessary for true enlightenment. Instead, Sylvia displayed the abuse of power and the cruelty which are the Vice of Gevurah.

In the arguments of A Dancer to God, it is the hidden poetic Self (and the true Divine Self which may lie within it) which is the wounded Self that must be healed: and to do this, the ordinary Ego must be destroyed. And Ted believed that in a visionary or shamanic poet, "each successive truly inspired creation can be read as the poetic Self's effort to make itself known". He also wrote that the "distinguishing features" of the presiding image of the poetic Self in such a creation are "that it is visionary, that it is irreducibly symbolic, and that it is dramatically complete". Both Ted's and Sylvia's quite different images of Daddy fulfil these criteria. But whilst Sylvia believed that she was ridding herself of something damaging and undesirable, Ted perceived that her situation was one in which the ordinary Ego and the poetic Self were "deadlocked", locked in a "death-struggle": thus, the image which she produced in 'Daddy' reflected this death-struggle and predicted her own fate (WP 276 -278).

For Ted, the presiding image in both 'Daddy' and 'The Cast' was that of St Narcissus, a name which he associated with "the drowned self, the female, dismembered, crying voice – from the fable of Narcissus", "the mirrored reflection". St Narcissus, for him, was a martyred figure, emblematic of "the earliest, ecstatic mystai" of the mystery religions; and an image of the "tragic, sacrificed form of Eros" (WP 282-3), god of Love. He saw T.S. Eliot's image of St Narcissus as an expression of Eliot's tortured poetic Self: it was an image created with love, and which could be redeemed by love. But although he heard the voice of Sylvia's poetic Self in 'Daddy', the image which she created was dominated by her Ego's anger. So, it became her own image, too: a heartless creation; a Shell.

So, it seems that at Tiphereth, at the Heart of the Tree, Sylvia did encounter the Divine energies in the form of a sacrificed god but her initiation and rebirth were not the desired end of her journey. She still had the lessons of Love to learn. And although she began again with "the different, cooler, inspiration (as she described it) and the denser pattern"(WP 189) of the poems from on 28 Jan. 1962 on, circumstances combined to bring about her death and prevent her from continuing her journey. Ted's final image in 'The Cast' sums up the terrible self-sacrifice which too quickly followed Sylvia's initiation on the Path of Lamed and cast her into the Void.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Hebrew letter, Lamed (meaning Ox-goad), embodies in its shape the letters Yod and Kaph to represent the descent of the seed of wisdom from the Divine (Yod) into the human heart (Kaph) to bring understanding and enlightenment. A similar connection with Divine energies is made through the position of this Path on the Cabbalistic Tree, where Sephira 6 is joined directly to Sephira 1 and stands in relation to it as the human Son does to the Divine Father. Sephiroth 5 and 6 also combine with Sephira 4 to form a triangle which is the mirror image of the Divine triangle of 1, 2 and 3 at the Tree's apex,

thus reflecting the Divine energies in the lower Worlds.

2. In numerology, 5 (Gevurah) + 6 (Tiphereth) = 11, the number of equilibrium and the number of the Tarot card of Strength. The potential for enlightenment is represented by the number for the path of Lamed, which is 12 – the number of completion. There are 12 Zodiacal signs which govern the Paths of the Tree and also govern our lives.

3. This is the crossed out title on a list of changes which Ted sent to his publishers prior to publication.

4. Daniel Weissbort tells of this in his own poem: 'Pity The Man Whom All Men Love', Letters To Ted, Anvil Press, 2002.

5. The legend of Saint Francis of Assisi and the Wolf of Gubbio demonstrates a Hermit's particular strength in controlling the wolf energies, although Cabbalists and Christians may interpret this legend differently.

6. Skea, A. 'Wolf Masks'. First published in Scigaj, L (Ed.), Critical Essays on Ted Hughes, G.K.Hall & Co, New York, 1992.

7. Ficino, Letters, Shepherd-Walwyn, London, 1978. Vol.2, letters 5 and 6; Vol. 5, letter 114.

8. Ficino (Trans. Boer), The Book of Life, Spring Publications, University of Dallas, Texas, 1980. p.190.

9. Sylvia, at this time, blamed her mother for many of her problems and did compare her mother's power over her to that of "the old witches" (SPJ 27 Dec. 1958).

10. George Ripley, 'Of Congelation', The Compound of Alchymy, London 1591.

11. Sylvia's journal entry for 18 Sept. 1958 notes her visit to the tattoo shop and her resolve to "spend all next morning writing it up". She first mentioned the story on 28 Dec. 1958, when she called it "imagey static prose", but by 31 May 1959 she included it amongst her successes.

12. The eagle on the Great Seal of the United States was chosen to represent one of the primary national groups to migrate to America and, in the first suggested designs, it was a double-headed German Imperial Eagle. Ultimately, the American bald eagle was chosen, but it is still a double bird: One representing Many, but also combining Heaven (the Sun bird of Zeus) and Earth; War and Peace.

13. "Dinner parties all this week", Sylvia noted in her journal on 19 Feb. 1959. And many of the people she mentioned at that time either lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, or worked there, generally at one of the universities.

14. Sylvia was very aware of the pressure to conform to the conventional expectations of family and friends. She wrote in her journal of “the pragmatic American world’s cold eye” and of the “expectation of conformity”, especially in “this part” of America [Massachusetts] (SPJ 11 Dec. 1958).

15. In Cabbalistic numerology, the 12 of Lamed, which indicates the completion of a worldly cycle of preparation, must be joined with the Divine power of 1 from the Apex of the Tree, to make 13, the number of rebirth.

16. In other Birthday Letters poems (e.g. ‘Costly Speech’ (BL 170 - 171) and ‘The Inscription’ (BL 172)), Ted suggests that Sylvia never learned the balance and the selfless love which are necessary for a true rebirth. In particular, he shows that the Power (of words), which she did gain on this Path of Lamed, was contaminated by the ‘Vice’ of Gevurah, which is cruelty.

17. The Void or Abyss is, again, a place about which Cabbalists hold differing and complex views. For some, it is the place where God’s earliest creations, those which failed due to lack of balance and judgement (and which, interestingly, are called “broken vessels”) accumulate as Shells (Qlippoth). It is often called the “dark” Abyss, but this darkness is metaphorical and indicates only that the Abyss is a place inhabited by Demons. Some understand it is the Void which was left when God created the All by contraction of the Ain Soph, and this Void is a place of scattered light, Qlippoth and potential Form.

18. In particular, in Pietre Breughel the Elder’s painting, ‘The Triumph of Death’, to which Sylvia referred in ‘Two Views of a Cadaver Room’ (SPCP 114), where she wrote of the “smoke and slaughter”, the “carrion army” and the “desolation” to which only two lovers (a small detail in the corner of the painting) are oblivious.

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Chapter 14 – Mem: The Hanged Man , was dealt with as part of the Inroduction. Both will be rewritten at a later date.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalDeath CardNun path

The Path of Death – Nun

Tarot card 13. Tree path 14.

Joining Sephiroth 6 (Tiphereth) and 7 (Netzach).

'Fate Playing', 'The Badlands', 'The Table', 'Life after Death'.

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Whilst The Hanged Man represents a sacrifice and a complete relinquishment and overturning of everything in the journeyer's former life, his Tarot trump and Path (Mem) also mark the completion of one part of the journey and a pause – an involuntary suspension – before the Initiate can move on. The upper Paths of the Tree – all those Paths leading to Initiation at Tiphereth – have been completed and their lessons, which dealt with the manifest, rational, conscious aspects of the individual's being, should have been learned. Now, the Initiate is immersed in the chaotic Mother-waters of Mem, in which all life begins and ends, and which are the dark waters of the unconscious, the instinct, and the Soul. In order to proceed on the journey, the Initiate must first find a way through these waters.

So, although the next tarot Trump is Death, the next Path on the Cabbalistic Tree is known as the Path of Nun: the Path of the Fish, which is "the symbol of life beneath the waters; of life travelling through the waters" (Crowley, BOT 99); of fertility; and of Osiris, Venus/Aphrodite, Isis and Hermes/Mercury.

The Path of Nun joins Tiphereth (Sephira 6) to Netzach (Sephira 7). It is the Path of re-evaluation, of loss of the conscious world and immersion in unconscious world of instinct, intuition and feeling. On this Path, the Harmony and Balance of Tiphereth is essential if the Victory and Eternity of Netzach and all its powers of 7 are to be successfully attained. And 7 is immensely powerful on this Path. It is the number of Venus/Aphrodite and, because 14 ($7 + 7$) is the Cabbalistic number of the Path of Nun, her powers, here, are doubly potent. A second Cabbalistic number associated with this Path is 50, which in numerology is $7 \times 7 = 49$ ('The Mystic Number of Venus') plus the Divine energy of 1. The fiftieth 'Gate of Understanding' (or 'Door of Light') which marks the end of the Cabbalistic journey is accessible from this Path of Nun¹. So, 7 represents the possibility of completion. The energies of 7, however, become operative only when conditions are right to establish a new order. And at different stages of the Cabbalistic journey, these energies vibrate according to the preparedness of the Initiate and the particular World (Atziluthic, Briatic etc.) in which the Initiate is journeying.

The Tarot number for this Path is 13, which is the number of the newly Initiated and is also a number of completion. And the Tarot card for this Path is 'Death'. On the Tradition Tarot cards, Death is shown as a skeleton with a scythe, surrounded by a chaos of blackness in which lie bones, limbs and heads, but also, green, sprouting plants. Death, as these plants signify, is not an end: it is "the apex of one curve of the snake of Life" (Crowley BOT 258), and in all occult quests it is a step on the journey to rebirth. For Cabbalists, as for the Alchemist and the Shaman, the skeleton symbolizes the death of the physical body – the death of that which is mortal and finite – in order to attain knowledge of the immortal. This 'death' is like the shamanic flight to the

Otherworld (which, for Jung, represented the journey into the human subconscious) after which the Initiate is reborn from “boneseed” to a higher order of existence. For the Alchemist, it begins the putrefaction and chaos from which cleansed spiritual gold will rise.

Death, therefore, is not an end, but a necessary step on the way to rebirth. Yet, between death and rebirth, the spirit must enter the chaos of unconsciousness which is variously called the Otherworld, Hell, the Void, the Bardo or, in the Greek mythology on which many Tarot symbols are based, the River of Acheron. So, in some texts, the figure on this Path is not Death but Charon, the Ferryman who will take the shade of the deceased to the Underworld. And always, in occult belief, the bodiless spirit requires a ferryman or guide in order to make this journey successfully. The Shaman has his or her spirit-guides; Dante had the poet, Vergil; the Alchemist and the Cabbalist have Hermes/Mercury (whose energies are powerfully expressed through the number 7) in one of his many disguises.

On this Path of Nun, in the Atziluthic World of Archetypes, Ted’s poem ‘Fate Playing’ (BL 31-2) is full of chaos and emotion. Sylvia is stranded in a strange environment in which there are rivers of people, seas of tears, and love “forty-nine times magnified”. And into this chaos comes a Mercurial taxi-driver, “like a small god”, who ferries Sylvia in his “chariot” between a bus-station and a railway station, both of which represent the end and the beginning of journeys. The situation is suitably Foolish, as befits Sylvia’s first encounter with the emotion-charged chaos of Nun, and Ted’s poem is full of exaggeration. But so, too, (as is clear from her letter to her mother (SPLH 16 Oct. 1955)) was Sylvia’s reaction to an unpredictable, but hardly irredeemable, situation.

Having arranged to meet Ted at King’s Cross Station, Sylvia decided to take an earlier train and meet his coach at Victoria Coach Station. Her letter to Ted, informing him of this change of plan, did not reach him in time. And he, too, changed the plan by getting off the coach as it passed near King’s Cross Station, so that he could meet the train he thought Sylvia would be on. Sylvia, when Ted did not get off the coach at Victoria as expected, was distraught. In floods of tears and a turmoil of emotion, she took a taxi to King’s Cross and found Ted waiting for her on the platform there. Both she and Ted describe her dreadful agitation and the rapture of their meeting. Sylvia wrote that “everything began to shine, and the taxi-driver sprouted wings”: and in Ted’s poem, he saw her “agitation” dissolve into “molten” tears of joy and “knew what it was / To be a miracle”. Such was the power of love!

Ted’s whole poem is governed by Mercurial energies. A mischievous “goblin” trickster spoils Sylvia’s careful plans and drops her at “eight in the evening” (a time governed by the transformative, serpentine number of Mercury’s caduceus) amidst a “kaleidoscope” of unrecognizable shapes, colours and sounds. Sylvia’s own energies are Mercurial, and range through the whole spectrum of emotions: panic, despair, fear, sorrow, determination, relief and ecstasy. And the taxi-driver in both her and Ted’s account is a small god – a winged cupid, who brings the lovers together. The energies of Tiphereth and Netzach, at each end of this Path of Nun, typically bring about a situation in which

“the apparently indestructible vessel of ego hits an iceberg of circumstances and begins to founder”, (Low, Notes on Cabbala 102), and Ted’s poem demonstrates just this situation. Sylvia’s ego was fragile. Once before, in Paris, Sylvia had arrived expecting to meet a lover (Sassoon) who failed to turn up, and this must have been one of the “precedents” which, Ted says, “tripped” her expectations. But this time, in London, love “forty-nine times magnified” allowed Sylvia to triumph, and Triumph is one of the things made possible by the energies of Netzach.

There is also an inevitability about events on the Path of Nun: Death and destiny are controlled by the Fates and are an inevitable part of Nature’s cycles; and one of the Cabbalistic meditations for this path is “Joined to Nature”. So, Ted and Sylvia see the happy resolution of their situation as “an omen”, and the tears which “splashed over” Ted like a drought-breaking “cloudburst” are a baptism which will bring new fertility to the “whole cracked earth” and to all its life-forms. They also mark the start a new, natural (in the sense of instinctive, spiritual and emotional), shared journey.

It is worth noting, too, the interesting discrepancy between Ted’s version of events in ‘Fate Playing’ and the account which Sylvia gives in her letter to her mother. Ted’s version is simpler. He describes his journey to King’s Cross as calm and “unperturbed”. And he describes his whole journey as being by train which, although late, arrives at the exact moment that Sylvia erupts (the paronomasia with ‘erupts’ adds to the violence of Sylvia’s sudden appearance) onto the platform. Thus, Ted reinforces the sense of inevitability about that meeting and the suggestion that Fate (as in the title of this poem) was responsible for its occurrence and its timing. The discrepancy also emphasizes the difference between Ted’s and Sylvia’s life-journeys up to that time. The period of suspension and sacrifice in Ted’s life was described in ‘Fidelity’ (BL 28). The more chaotic hiatus in Sylvia’s journey is described in ‘Fate Playing’ where, finally, their separate and different paths are united by the baptism of tears. Now, they would begin their shared journey of the spirit. And so conjoined were they that in ‘The Owl’ (BL 33), which immediately follows ‘Fate Playing’ in the Birthday Letters sequence, Ted describes seeing his world (of Nature) anew, through Sylvia’s eyes.

By July 1959, however, Sylvia and Ted were again in the process of moving between two worlds. They had left Boston and by the end of December they would be in England. Meanwhile, they travelled literally and metaphorically – in body and in spirit – through unknown territory. And this time there was no jolly, small god to ferry Sylvia swiftly across the divide; and no excess of Childish – Foolish emotion and love to carry her through. Instead, she and Ted, just a little older and a little wiser, were searching for their own Way through the place where they believed Sylvia’s true Self had gone to ground. Now, on the Path of Death in the World of Briah, they set out (again literally and metaphorically) across the American ‘Badlands’ in a borrowed car.

The Badlands, in the poem which is the Birthday Letters poem on this particular Path (BL 82 - 86), are a sun-scorched wasteland, a “Hell” of “smouldering bitumen”, where the earth itself is like a “disembowelled” body, a place of “perpetual sacrifice” in which thorny plants push, like “loose teeth” and “bone”, through the “charred” crust. Ted’s

imagery vividly recreates the black, bone-strewn earth on which the skeleton dances in the Traditional Tarot card of Death. And, as on this card, there are also small signs of life: a snake; a “lone tree”, to which Ted turned as if for comfort but which “gave none”; and, at the moment when the land was darkest, most frightening, “most inimical”, there was suddenly a mouse, bursting with Mercurial energy, the sole purpose of which seemed to be to protect two “dewdrops” of eyes which were the only suggestion of fresh, life-giving water in this terrible place.

All of Ted’s imagery in the poem suggests the fierce, destructive power of the sun and an imbalance in the eternal cycles of Nature in which sun alternates with moon, light follows darkness, destruction is followed by new life. In our own interpretation of the world, in myth, religion and psychology, we often see these cycles in terms of Manichean conflict where black is opposed to white, hell is opposed to heaven, and the non-rational, subjective, subconscious aspects of our being are suppressed in favour of the rational, objective and conscious. This, in Ted’s view, and in the view of Cabbalists, Alchemists, and other spiritual questers, is a false, unbalanced and potentially dangerous view of the world. Ted wrote about it at length in his two essays entitled ‘Myth and Education’²; it is an underlying theme in all his work and it is one of the themes in this poem.

Foremost in this poem, is Sylvia’s own struggle to find her true Self, which began when that Self was driven “underground, into moonland” by the explosive effects of actual solar, nuclear and electrical events on her mind and body³. So, this journey through the Badlands is a spiritual quest, and it begins and ends in the presence of “the timeless one” of Nature – the snake – the guide. In pre-dawn darkness, under stone, beside water, and heralded by the laughter of a loon (which in *Under the North Star* is “hatched from the moon”⁴), on the threshold of their journey, Ted finds a snake whose colours, significantly, alternate black and white. He is reminded of the coiled spirals carved on the lintel stone at New Grainge (Boyne, Ireland), a prehistoric tumulus which is the womb of Graine, the Great Mother; the place where the bones of her consort, Dagda, lay; and the place where their son, the Love-god Aenghus, was born. The snake appears again in the poem as the yellow, sluggish river Missouri. But it emerges in all its power at the end of the poem where, as the sun goes down and its power drains away, Ted and Sylvia become aware of something “like ectoplasm” oozing like a huge snake from the dark clefts of the earth. They experience it as something primitive, unknown, and terrifying, something which feels “evil” but which is “maybe” the earth, maybe themselves, maybe life itself. It is as if their own dark energies are being drawn by the emptiness into this silent “afterlife” landscape of death: as if terrifyingly, life is emerging into this world through them.

So, in this World of Briah where the creative energies begin to form patterns for the future, the emptiness and chaos of Nun is experienced as a Hell which is exactly comparable to the Hell of barren infertility about which Sylvia wrote in her last journal entry before she and Ted began their journey across America. “Everything has gone barren”, she wrote (SPJ 20 June 1959), in an agony of despair at the physical and imaginative infertility which was turning her whole world to “Ash. Ash and more ash”.

Ted describes her in the poem as wounded in both body and spirit: "signed and empty". But the journey which they take, and the lesson which they learn as they cross the Badlands, is not just that such infertility is the result of an imbalance, but that they have within themselves natural energies which will inevitably surface in an attempt to heal the wound.

In his two essays, 'Myth and Education', Ted wrote at length of our need to acknowledge and learn about these energies of our inner world, and of our need to balance them with the objective, rational, energies on which we have been taught to rely too much. He wrote of our imagination as "the faculty which embraces both worlds simultaneously" (WP 150) and he wrote, too, of the danger of ignoring or suppressing the inner world and of the sickness and "probably fatal accidents" this is likely to cause⁵.

Of particular relevance to 'The Badlands' is Ted's suggestion that the inner world is "indescribable, impenetrable and invisible" (WP 144), a place which affects our whole life but which is so strange to us that it has become the "place of demons", a "vast absence" or "emptiness". "If we do manage to catch a glimpse of our inner selves", he wrote, "we recognize it with horror – it is an animal crawling and decomposing in a hell." (WP 149). This is exactly the experience which Ted describes at the end of 'The Badlands' as he and Sylvia feel the ectoplasmic, terrifying, snake-like "something" welling up in the darkness: and Sylvia calls it "evil", "real evil". But Sylvia does glimpse the truth. When she suggests that "Maybe it's the life/ In us / Frightening the earth, and Frightening us". Ted's line breaks, here, set "in us" by itself in the penultimate line of the poem, emphasizing the importance of this perception and including all of us within its scope.

But the lesson of the Path of Nun for Ted and Sylvia is more personal. Ted believed that imagination has the power to link our inner and outer worlds, he also believed that true poets and story-tellers have traditionally used this power to help others: that they (as he suggested to Ekbert Faas⁶) take imaginative shamanic flights to the Otherworld to bring back some healing energies needed in this world. Now, in the final line of 'The Badlands', he and Sylvia – both of them imaginative poets and story-tellers who have experienced Hell and have felt the devouring-creating energies of the Uroborus within themselves – are united with the earth (with Nature) and share its energies. This, frightening connection, on this particular Path, offers hope (if they learn to understand and use their powers correctly) not just of Endurance, Victory, and personal renewal, but also that they may learn to channel some of these healing energies in our world. But as Ted noted, "One thing to find a guide / Another to follow him".

In 'The Rag Rug' (BL 135) on the Path of the Hanged Man, the snake was an important symbol of creativity. That poem describes how Ted, like a snake-charmer, helped Sylvia to unearth her deep creative energies and how he dreamed, too, of a great golden serpent which overturned their world and shook awake the snake which would end their "Eden". Now, in 'The Table' (BL 138-9), the poem which directly follows 'The Rag Rug' and which lies on the Path of Death in the World of Yetzirah, Ted and Sylvia approach

Netzach (Sephira 7) for the third time in their Cabbalistic journey. The energies of 7 on this Path are three times magnified: and 777 (the grand scale of 7) is a number which Crowley describes as “a dangerous tool”; one which represents “the flaming sword which drove Man out of Eden”; a number whose power is only available to those in whom the snake of “Kundalini energy”, the energy of “the female magical soul” has been awakened (Crowley, 777, 49).

Certainly, this should be the state of those who have reached this stage of the Cabbalistic journey. By now, too, each quester should have learned of the particular guides, rituals and methods which will aid and protect them as they move between their inner and outer worlds on this path.

In ‘The Table’, Sylvia has clearly reached this state of preparedness and skill, but the poem suggests that she uses her powers for divination and conjuring, rather than for healing. In 1961, Ted did make Sylvia a table from a piece of wood which she described to her mother as “a great plank” (SPLH 5 Sept. 1961). Whether or not this table had any magical purpose at that time is impossible to know, but in this poem it has great magical significance. To begin with, Ted tells us that it was made of Elm: a coffin-timber which, traditionally, makes a strong, protective vessel in which the corpse may journey from the watery chaos “of earth” to the shores of the Underworld.

Elm wood, however, is associated with rebirth as well as death. The Elm is a door between our world and the Underworld, and through it, in both directions, move elves, sprites and other spirits. And the first Elm grove, it is said, sprang into existence in response to the love song which Orpheus played for Euridice when he returned alone from the Underworld. So, Ted’s elm table, with its Orphic associations, was intended to be a desk on which Sylvia set down the product of her inspiration: but it also came to serve a more sinister and dangerous function.

In notes which Ted wrote in 1998 to two German translators of Birthday Letters, he explained that the Elm tree, all over Europe, is “the tree at the door of the underworld, a death tree”. In the same notes, he described Sylvia’s Ariel voice arriving “with a bang” in her poem, ‘Elm’; and he said that this was the poem in which “the mythos of her father emerged fully into her work, bringing its own great problem with it”⁷. This, Ted wrote, was what ‘The Table’, was all about. And, indeed, his poem links Sylvia’s Ariel voice with inspiration, words, table, magic, death and destruction.

Table picture

Tables, too, have their own magical and occult significance as tools on which symbols and words are ritually inscribed. In the Heptarchic, planetary magic of John Dee, the Holy Table was the means by which the angelic powers, symbolized by the sigils inscribed on it, were brought together with the magician⁸. And in Freemasonry, still, three “tracing boards” or “tables” display symbols associated with particular stages or “degrees” of the Mason’s craft. On the tracing board for the “third degree”, is inscribed a skeleton (or skull and bones) either in or on a coffin. Special words of occult power may be inscribed on this board; and also shown is a curtained doorway at which one curtain

is drawn back to reveal an enthroned figure in the place beyond. Such images and symbols and their meanings show clear parallels with the Path of Death (Nun) in the third of the Cabbalistic Worlds; and with the imagery of Ted's poem.

At her elm desk, Sylvia, with Ariel's help, conjured the Daddy of her "whole" subconscious memory: not necessarily her father's true spirit, but a blue-eyed German "cuckoo" – an impersonator who took over both her life and Ted's, and distorted her vision to such an extent that she began to see him as Ted.

Ted did not understand what was happening. He was "deafened", he says, by this "German" which was outside his own "wavelengths" and which blocked his own intuitive powers and cut him off from reality. And again, as well as conveying the foreign-ness and un-germane⁹ nature of what was happening to him, there are association with occult magic in the word 'German'. Germany, in the sixteenth-century was the place where all kinds of occult magic were fostered. It attracted NeoPlatonists, cabbalists, alchemists and magicians such as Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno, John Dee and Edward Kelly, and many others whose works were well known to Ted and (perhaps to a lesser degree) to Sylvia. The language of these magicians was often deliberately arcane: a secret language of sigils and signs, recognizable only to those who used them.

The language which Sylvia divined "in the elm" was unique to her. And the spirit of Daddy, which she called up "in broad daylight" with the words she found and inscribed at her desk, was incomprehensible to Ted. After Sylvia's death, without her energies and her "cursing and imploring" words, the code she used became "scrambled" and the magic no longer worked. So the "sigils" and the stains she left behind on her desk became powerless fragments of the words she "engraved" there, and their significance, now, is lost on the "peanut-crunchers" (those who have made Sylvia their idol and for whom any object associated with her is a "curio", an amusement) who come only to "stare".

Nevertheless, although emptied of Sylvia's magic, Ted would have been superstitiously aware of the dangers the table still posed to him. It is an old superstition that any object holding someone's body fluids may be used by a magician or witch to harm that person. So, in the final lines of the poem Ted ensured that the elm table-top was submerged in the salt waters of "the Atlantic" and "scoured" free of any traces of his own bodily fluids and of all the energies which he (at that time misguidedly) had invested in it. After such literal and poetic cleansing it would be again "simply a board".

The final poem on the path of Death, in the dark World of Assiah, is 'Life after Death' (BL 182-3). It is a poem full of pain, grief and torment and yet it is full of beauty. Death took Sylvia, body and soul, into the Otherworld; and it overturned the world of her loved-ones, too. The hard bones and the wounds from Death's scythe, the agonizing pain of separation, and the chaos of the afterlife, affected them all.

Sylvia already knew all about this sort of life after death from the death of her father.

Now, she was truly experiencing Death's Otherworld. So what could Ted tell her about life after death that she did not already know?

Nothing.

And nothing is exactly what this poem is about: the emptiness of loss, the chaos of raw emotion, the silence of the Void, and the closed circle of eternity – of the tail-eating snake Uroborus which symbolizes nature's endless cycles of death and rebirth. This is the "Power of Nature" which is represented by the Mystical number of Netzach in this World of Assiah where 7 is now four times magnified ($7 + 7 + 7 + 7 = 28$). And Nature's power can be seen in the things which Sylvia's children inherited from her: the epicanthic fold and the jewel-like eyes of her son; and the terrible wound of childhood loss which she passes (in this poem) to her daughter.

It is as if the spirits of Ted and the children were so bound up with Sylvia's spirit, that Death took them all into the Void; and the pain of separation was most nakedly seen in the youngest, where life was still almost wholly made up of instinct and emotion. But the spirits of all three were still tethered to bodies which "day by day" still ate and slept and grew. Ted describes his own spirit, in the careful ambiguity of the words "dropped from life", as both suspended from life and suspended by life. He fed the baby, dressed and comforted his daughter, but was merely "awake in" his body and responding automatically to their needs.

The thread which ties the spirit to the body is immensely strong. It is the silver thread of Ecclesiastes (12:6) which is broken by death; the thread woven by the Greek Fates, which can only be cut by Atropos, the terrible goddess of the Old Moon, daughter of Night. It is also the soft, almost unbreakable thread with which the Norse gods tethered the Chaos of Nature, in the form of the great wolf, Fenrir, who was born of the Hag, Hel. No ordinary chain could hold him. Only one made of the essences of Nature: "the miaul of a cat, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the tendons of a bear, the breath of a fish and the spittle of a bird"¹⁰.

So, the spirits of the wolves of the world, the offspring of Fenrir, are tethered by Nature to their bodies of fur and flesh and they howl for eternity¹¹ and for their lost freedom. And so, in Ted's poem, it is the wolves in the zoo, their spirits tethered by Nature and their bodies caged by Man, who share the life after death of Sylvia's loved-ones. All through the wintry moon-months of February and March they sang. And the three humans, each tethered to their own body, each in their separate "cots", were comforted by this shared music of mourning, which wrapped around them and wove them back into the web of Nature.

Ted weaves the sad, beautiful, healing music of the wolves into five lines near the end of his poem. There, he and the children are united with Sylvia under blankets of snow.

And, in the final five lines, Ted describes how his body, but not his spirit, sank into a folk-tale of wolves and forest, orphaned babes and a dead mother. It is an old tale,

woven from patterns of life which were for generations so common to the peoples of Europe that we easily recognize its images and become part of the story¹².

Even in folk-tales, however, the mother's corpse, as in the very last line of Ted's poem, remains a harsh, unchangeable fact. So, in fiftieth line¹³ of this last poem on this Path of Death (Nun), the Gates of Understanding have led both Ted and Sylvia to the eternal and ineluctable presence of Death. And to the understanding that we are all, indeed, Joined to Nature.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Each of the seven Sephiroth which lie below the Supernal Triangle of Sephira 1, 2 and 3, contains a reflection of the whole lower Tree (Sephiroth 1 to 4). So, the number 49 represents all the energies of the lower Tree, and the forty-nine levels of Wisdom which, if correctly learned and used will allow the Initiate to penetrate the Veil of Binah and become One with the Divine Source. Through the powers of 7, therefore, the Initiate may emergence from chaos into order and complete the Cabbalistic journey.
2. 'Myth and Education', *Children's Literature in Education*, March 1970, 1 :55 -70. 'Myth and Education', *Writers, Critics, and Children*, Heinemann, 1976 - republished in *Winter Pollen*, Faber, 1994 (pp. 136 -153). These two essays are quite different, although the theme is the same.
3. The use of Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the electrocution of the Rosenbergs, were events which caused Sylvia great distress and helped to precipitate the suicidal despair which resulted in her own subjection to the "lightning" of electric shock therapy.
4. Ted Hughes, 'The Loon', *Under The North Star*, Faber, 1981.
5. Given the events in Manhattan on 11 Sept. 2001, it is tempting to see the dream which Ted describes in 'The Badlands' as prophetic but he, I think, would have seen this act of terrorism as a symptom of our sickness, not as Nature's attempt to redress a material/spiritual imbalance, however real that may be. 'The Badlands', however, does deal with the spoiling of "Planetary America" by excessive worship of the sun, of rationality and of materialism. "The moonland" has gone underground, and the old Indian who is linked with the mighty force of Nature at the end of the poem seems to represent a people who once lived in harmony with the land but who now exist only in memory and vision.
6. Faas, UU 206.
7. Letter from Ted Hughes to "Andrea and Robert", dated 16 June 1998. Ted sent a copy of this letter to Keith Sagar and this is currently amongst the Hughes / Sagar correspondence held by the British Library. I quote from my own copy of this letter.

8. The exact dimensions of Dee's table were dictated to his scribe, Edward Kelly, by the angelic spirit, Nalvage. The angels Nalvage and Gabriel also dictated the 'table', or matrix, of 49 squares (7 x 7) containing the names of the 49 angelic powers or "voices" which they described as "the natural keys, to open...the Gates of Understanding". (Fenton (Ed.), *The Diaries of John Dee*, Day Books, Oxfordshire, 1998. p. 118). And, as Ted tells us in 'Fairy Tale' (BL 159) forty-nine was also Sylvia's "magic number".

9. 'German' and 'germane' were once interchangeable words.

10. Graves, *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, Hamlyn, 1959. p. 226).

11. One of the few poems which Ted wrote in the months after Sylvia's death was 'The Howling of Wolves' (Wodwo 178). In it he writes that the wolf "is living for the earth" and, so, "must feed its fur". The poem takes its title from one of William Blake's 'Proverbs of Hell': "The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man".

12. It is not surprising that Ted should have thought of his situation in terms of a folk-tale. In a letter which he wrote to a friend shortly after Sylvia's death he talked of the way he had become an actor in the dramas other people invented for him. Some, for example, expected him to die of remorse: others that he should live on as curator of Sylvia's shrine. Life, he wrote, had become complicated and tricky.

13. The grouping of lines in 'Life after Death' reflects all the important Cabbalistic numbers associated with the Path of Nun: 2, which reflects the dichotomies of Life/Death, Inner/Outer, Body/Spirit; 12 and 10 both of which signify the completion of a cycle; 4, which is the number of the elements of chaos from which all things are made; 5, the number of Mankind, the number from which the two paths (outer and inner) open; and 50, the number of the Path of Nun and the number of the Gates of Understanding.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalDeath CardNun path

The Path of Death – Nun

Tarot card 13. Tree path 14.

Joining Sephiroth 6 (Tiphereth) and 7 (Netzach).

'Fate Playing', 'The Badlands', 'The Table', 'Life after Death'.

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Whilst The Hanged Man represents a sacrifice and a complete relinquishment and overturning of everything in the journeyer's former life, his Tarot trump and Path (Mem) also mark the completion of one part of the journey and a pause – an involuntary suspension – before the Initiate can move on. The upper Paths of the Tree – all those Paths leading to Initiation at Tiphereth – have been completed and their lessons, which dealt with the manifest, rational, conscious aspects of the individual's being, should have been learned. Now, the Initiate is immersed in the chaotic Mother-waters of Mem, in which all life begins and ends, and which are the dark waters of the unconscious, the instinct, and the Soul. In order to proceed on the journey, the Initiate must first find a way through these waters.

So, although the next tarot Trump is Death, the next Path on the Cabbalistic Tree is known as the Path of Nun: the Path of the Fish, which is "the symbol of life beneath the waters; of life travelling through the waters" (Crowley, BOT 99); of fertility; and of Osiris, Venus/Aphrodite, Isis and Hermes/Mercury.

The Path of Nun joins Tiphereth (Sephira 6) to Netzach (Sephira 7). It is the Path of re-evaluation, of loss of the conscious world and immersion in unconscious world of instinct, intuition and feeling. On this Path, the Harmony and Balance of Tiphereth is essential if the Victory and Eternity of Netzach and all its powers of 7 are to be successfully attained. And 7 is immensely powerful on this Path. It is the number of Venus/Aphrodite and, because 14 ($7 + 7$) is the Cabbalistic number of the Path of Nun, her powers, here, are doubly potent. A second Cabbalistic number associated with this Path is 50, which in numerology is $7 \times 7 = 49$ ('The Mystic Number of Venus') plus the Divine energy of 1. The fiftieth 'Gate of Understanding' (or 'Door of Light') which marks the end of the Cabbalistic journey is accessible from this Path of Nun¹. So, 7 represents the possibility of completion. The energies of 7, however, become operative only when conditions are right to establish a new order. And at different stages of the Cabbalistic journey, these energies vibrate according to the preparedness of the Initiate and the particular World (Atziluthic, Briatic etc.) in which the Initiate is journeying.

The Tarot number for this Path is 13, which is the number of the newly Initiated and is also a number of completion. And the Tarot card for this Path is 'Death'. On the Tradition Tarot cards, Death is shown as a skeleton with a scythe, surrounded by a chaos of blackness in which lie bones, limbs and heads, but also, green, sprouting plants. Death, as these plants signify, is not an end: it is "the apex of one curve of the snake of Life" (Crowley BOT 258), and in all occult quests it is a step on the journey to rebirth. For Cabbalists, as for the Alchemist and the Shaman, the skeleton symbolizes the death of the physical body – the death of that which is mortal and finite – in order to attain knowledge of the immortal. This 'death' is like the shamanic flight to the Otherworld (which, for Jung, represented the journey into the human subconscious) after which the Initiate is reborn from "boneseed" to a higher order of existence. For the

Alchemist, it begins the putrefaction and chaos from which cleansed spiritual gold will rise.

Death, therefore, is not an end, but a necessary step on the way to rebirth. Yet, between death and rebirth, the spirit must enter the chaos of unconsciousness which is variously called the Otherworld, Hell, the Void, the Bardo or, in the Greek mythology on which many Tarot symbols are based, the River of Acheron. So, in some texts, the figure on this Path is not Death but Charon, the Ferryman who will take the shade of the deceased to the Underworld. And always, in occult belief, the bodiless spirit requires a ferryman or guide in order to make this journey successfully. The Shaman has his or her spirit-guides; Dante had the poet, Vergil; the Alchemist and the Cabbalist have Hermes/Mercury (whose energies are powerfully expressed through the number 7) in one of his many disguises.

On this Path of Nun, in the Atziluthic World of Archetypes, Ted's poem 'Fate Playing' (BL 31-2) is full of chaos and emotion. Sylvia is stranded in a strange environment in which there are rivers of people, seas of tears, and love "forty-nine times magnified". And into this chaos comes a Mercurial taxi-driver, "like a small god", who ferries Sylvia in his "chariot" between a bus-station and a railway station, both of which represent the end and the beginning of journeys. The situation is suitably Foolish, as befits Sylvia's first encounter with the emotion-charged chaos of Nun, and Ted's poem is full of exaggeration. But so, too, (as is clear from her letter to her mother (SPLH 16 Oct. 1955)) was Sylviav's reaction to an unpredictable, but hardly irredeemable, situation.

Having arranged to meet Ted at King's Cross Station, Sylvia decided to take an earlier train and meet his coach at Victoria Coach Station. Her letter to Ted, informing him of this change of plan, did not reach him in time. And he, too, changed the plan by getting off the coach as it passed near King's Cross Station, so that he could meet the train he thought Sylvia would be on. Sylvia, when Ted did not get off the coach at Victoria as expected, was distraught. In floods of tears and a turmoil of emotion, she took a taxi to King's Cross and found Ted waiting for her on the platform there. Both she and Ted describe her dreadful agitation and the rapture of their meeting. Sylvia wrote that "everything began to shine, and the taxi-driver sprouted wings": and in Ted's poem, he saw her "agitation" dissolve into "molten" tears of joy and "knew what it was / To be a miracle". Such was the power of love!

Ted's whole poem is governed by Mercurial energies. A mischievous "goblin" trickster spoils Sylvia's careful plans and drops her at "eight in the evening" (a time governed by the transformative, serpentine number of Mercury's caduceus) amidst a "kaleidoscope" of unrecognizable shapes, colours and sounds. Sylvia's own energies are Mercurial, and range through the whole spectrum of emotions: panic, despair, fear, sorrow, determination, relief and ecstasy. And the taxi-driver in both her and Ted's account is a small god – a winged cupid, who brings the lovers together. The energies of Tiphereth and Netzach, at each end of this Path of Nun, typically bring about a situation in which "the apparently indestructible vessel of ego hits an iceberg of circumstances and begins to founder", (Low, Notes on Cabbala 102), and Ted's poem demonstrates just this

situation. Sylvia's ego was fragile. Once before, in Paris, Sylvia had arrived expecting to meet a lover (Sassoon) who failed to turn up, and this must have been one of the "precedents" which, Ted says, "tripped" her expectations. But this time, in London, love "forty-nine times magnified" allowed Sylvia to triumph, and Triumph is one of the things made possible by the energies of Netzach.

There is also an inevitability about events on the Path of Nun: Death and destiny are controlled by the Fates and are an inevitable part of Nature's cycles; and one of the Cabbalistic meditations for this path is "Joined to Nature". So, Ted and Sylvia see the happy resolution of their situation as "an omen", and the tears which "splashed over" Ted like a drought-breaking "cloudburst" are a baptism which will bring new fertility to the "whole cracked earth" and to all its life-forms. They also mark the start a new, natural (in the sense of instinctive, spiritual and emotional), shared journey.

It is worth noting, too, the interesting discrepancy between Ted's version of events in 'Fate Playing' and the account which Sylvia gives in her letter to her mother. Ted's version is simpler. He describes his journey to King's Cross as calm and "unperturbed". And he describes his whole journey as being by train which, although late, arrives at the exact moment that Sylvia erupts (the paronomasia with 'erupts' adds to the violence of Sylvia's sudden appearance) onto the platform. Thus, Ted reinforces the sense of inevitability about that meeting and the suggestion that Fate (as in the title of this poem) was responsible for its occurrence and its timing. The discrepancy also emphasizes the difference between Ted's and Sylvia's life-journeys up to that time. The period of suspension and sacrifice in Ted's life was described in 'Fidelity' (BL 28). The more chaotic hiatus in Sylvia's journey is described in 'Fate Playing' where, finally, their separate and different paths are united by the baptism of tears. Now, they would begin their shared journey of the spirit. And so conjoined were they that in 'The Owl' (BL 33), which immediately follows 'Fate Playing' in the Birthday Letters sequence, Ted describes seeing his world (of Nature) anew, through Sylvia's eyes.

By July 1959, however, Sylvia and Ted were again in the process of moving between two worlds. They had left Boston and by the end of December they would be in England. Meanwhile, they travelled literally and metaphorically – in body and in spirit – through unknown territory. And this time there was no jolly, small god to ferry Sylvia swiftly across the divide; and no excess of Childish – Foolish emotion and love to carry her through. Instead, she and Ted, just a little older and a little wiser, were searching for their own Way through the place where they believed Sylvia's true Self had gone to ground. Now, on the Path of Death in the World of Briah, they set out (again literally and metaphorically) across the American 'Badlands' in a borrowed car.

The Badlands, in the poem which is the Birthday Letters poem on this particular Path (BL 82 - 86), are a sun-scorched wasteland, a "Hell" of "smouldering bitumen", where the earth itself is like a "disembowelled" body, a place of "perpetual sacrifice" in which thorny plants push, like "loose teeth" and "bone", through the "charred" crust. Ted's imagery vividly recreates the black, bone-strewn earth on which the skeleton dances in the Traditional Tarot card of Death. And, as on this card, there are also small signs of

life: a snake; a “lone tree”, to which Ted turned as if for comfort but which “gave none”; and, at the moment when the land was darkest, most frightening, “most inimical”, there was suddenly a mouse, bursting with Mercurial energy, the sole purpose of which seemed to be to protect two “dewdrops” of eyes which were the only suggestion of fresh, life-giving water in this terrible place.

All of Ted’s imagery in the poem suggests the fierce, destructive power of the sun and an imbalance in the eternal cycles of Nature in which sun alternates with moon, light follows darkness, destruction is followed by new life. In our own interpretation of the world, in myth, religion and psychology, we often see these cycles in terms of Manichean conflict where black is opposed to white, hell is opposed to heaven, and the non-rational, subjective, subconscious aspects of our being are suppressed in favour of the rational, objective and conscious. This, in Ted’s view, and in the view of Cabbalists, Alchemists, and other spiritual questers, is a false, unbalanced and potentially dangerous view of the world. Ted wrote about it at length in his two essays entitled ‘Myth and Education’²; it is an underlying theme in all his work and it is one of the themes in this poem.

Foremost in this poem, is Sylvia’s own struggle to find her true Self, which began when that Self was driven “underground, into moonland” by the explosive effects of actual solar, nuclear and electrical events on her mind and body³. So, this journey through the Badlands is a spiritual quest, and it begins and ends in the presence of “the timeless one” of Nature – the snake – the guide. In pre-dawn darkness, under stone, beside water, and heralded by the laughter of a loon (which in *Under the North Star* is “hatched from the moon”⁴), on the threshold of their journey, Ted finds a snake whose colours, significantly, alternate black and white. He is reminded of the coiled spirals carved on the lintel stone at New Grainge (Boyne, Ireland), a prehistoric tumulus which is the womb of Grainge, the Great Mother; the place where the bones of her consort, Dagda, lay; and the place where their son, the Love-god Aenghus, was born. The snake appears again in the poem as the yellow, sluggish river Missouri. But it emerges in all its power at the end of the poem where, as the sun goes down and its power drains away, Ted and Sylvia become aware of something “like ectoplasm” oozing like a huge snake from the dark clefts of the earth. They experience it as something primitive, unknown, and terrifying, something which feels “evil” but which is “maybe” the earth, maybe themselves, maybe life itself. It is as if their own dark energies are being drawn by the emptiness into this silent “afterlife” landscape of death: as if terrifyingly, life is emerging into this world through them.

So, in this World of Briah where the creative energies begin to form patterns for the future, the emptiness and chaos of Nun is experienced as a Hell which is exactly comparable to the Hell of barren infertility about which Sylvia wrote in her last journal entry before she and Ted began their journey across America. “Everything has gone barren”, she wrote (SPJ 20 June 1959), in an agony of despair at the physical and imaginative infertility which was turning her whole world to “Ash. Ash and more ash”. Ted describes her in the poem as wounded in both body and spirit: “signed and empty”. But the journey which they take, and the lesson which they learn as they cross the

Badlands, is not just that such infertility is the result of an imbalance, but that they have within themselves natural energies which will inevitably surface in an attempt to heal the wound.

In his two essays, 'Myth and Education', Ted wrote at length of our need to acknowledge and learn about these energies of our inner world, and of our need to balance them with the objective, rational, energies on which we have been taught to rely too much. He wrote of our imagination as "the faculty which embraces both worlds simultaneously" (WP 150) and he wrote, too, of the danger of ignoring or suppressing the inner world and of the sickness and "probably fatal accidents" this is likely to cause⁵.

Of particular relevance to 'The Badlands' is Ted's suggestion that the inner world is "indescribable, impenetrable and invisible" (WP 144), a place which affects our whole life but which is so strange to us that it has become the "place of demons", a "vast absence" or "emptiness". "If we do manage to catch a glimpse of our inner selves", he wrote, "we recognize it with horror – it is an animal crawling and decomposing in a hell." (WP 149). This is exactly the experience which Ted describes at the end of 'The Badlands' as he and Sylvia feel the ectoplasmic, terrifying, snake-like "something" welling up in the darkness: and Sylvia calls it "evil", "real evil". But Sylvia does glimpse the truth. When she suggests that "Maybe it's the life/ In us / Frightening the earth, and Frightening us". Ted's line breaks, here, set "in us" by itself in the penultimate line of the poem, emphasizing the importance of this perception and including all of us within its scope.

But the lesson of the Path of Nun for Ted and Sylvia is more personal. Ted believed that imagination has the power to link our inner and outer worlds, he also believed that true poets and story-tellers have traditionally used this power to help others: that they (as he suggested to Ekbert Faas⁶) take imaginative shamanic flights to the Otherworld to bring back some healing energies needed in this world. Now, in the final line of 'The Badlands', he and Sylvia – both of them imaginative poets and story-tellers who have experienced Hell and have felt the devouring-creating energies of the Uroboros within themselves – are united with the earth (with Nature) and share its energies. This, frightening connection, on this particular Path, offers hope (if they learn to understand and use their powers correctly) not just of Endurance, Victory, and personal renewal, but also that they may learn to channel some of these healing energies in our world. But as Ted noted, "One thing to find a guide / Another to follow him".

In 'The Rag Rug' (BL 135) on the Path of the Hanged Man, the snake was an important symbol of creativity. That poem describes how Ted, like a snake-charmer, helped Sylvia to unearth her deep creative energies and how he dreamed, too, of a great golden serpent which overturned their world and shook awake the snake which would end their "Eden". Now, in 'The Table' (BL 138-9), the poem which directly follows 'The Rag Rug' and which lies on the Path of Death in the World of Yetzirah, Ted and Sylvia approach Netzach (Sephira 7) for the third time in their Cabbalistic journey. The energies of 7 on this Path are three times magnified: and 777 (the grand scale of 7) is a number which

Crowley describes as “a dangerous tool”; one which represents “the flaming sword which drove Man out of Eden”; a number whose power is only available to those in whom the snake of “Kundalini energy”, the energy of “the female magical soul” has been awakened (Crowley, 777, 49).

Certainly, this should be the state of those who have reached this stage of the Cabbalistic journey. By now, too, each quester should have learned of the particular guides, rituals and methods which will aid and protect them as they move between their inner and outer worlds on this path.

In ‘The Table’, Sylvia has clearly reached this state of preparedness and skill, but the poem suggests that she uses her powers for divination and conjuring, rather than for healing. In 1961, Ted did make Sylvia a table from a piece of wood which she described to her mother as “a great plank” (SPLH 5 Sept. 1961). Whether or not this table had any magical purpose at that time is impossible to know, but in this poem it has great magical significance. To begin with, Ted tells us that it was made of Elm: a coffin-timber which, traditionally, makes a strong, protective vessel in which the corpse may journey from the watery chaos “of earth” to the shores of the Underworld.

Elm wood, however, is associated with rebirth as well as death. The Elm is a door between our world and the Underworld, and through it, in both directions, move elves, sprites and other spirits. And the first Elm grove, it is said, sprang into existence in response to the love song which Orpheus played for Euridice when he returned alone from the Underworld. So, Ted’s elm table, with its Orphic associations, was intended to be a desk on which Sylvia set down the product of her inspiration: but it also came to serve a more sinister and dangerous function.

In notes which Ted wrote in 1998 to two German translators of Birthday Letters, he explained that the Elm tree, all over Europe, is “the tree at the door of the underworld, a death tree”. In the same notes, he described Sylvia’s Ariel voice arriving “with a bang” in her poem, ‘Elm’; and he said that this was the poem in which “the mythos of her father emerged fully into her work, bringing its own great problem with it”⁷. This, Ted wrote, was what ‘The Table’, was all about. And, indeed, his poem links Sylvia’s Ariel voice with inspiration, words, table, magic, death and destruction.

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third of the Cabbalistic Worlds; and with the imagery of Ted's poem.

At her elm desk, Sylvia, with Ariel's help, conjured the Daddy of her "whole" subconscious memory: not necessarily her father's true spirit, but a blue-eyed German "cuckoo" – an impersonator who took over both her life and Ted's, and distorted her vision to such an extent that she began to see him as Ted.

Ted did not understand what was happening. He was "deafened", he says, by this "German" which was outside his own "wavelengths" and which blocked his own intuitive powers and cut him off from reality. And again, as well as conveying the foreign-ness and un-germane⁹ nature of what was happening to him, there are association with occult magic in the word 'German'. Germany, in the sixteenth-century was the place where all kinds of occult magic were fostered. It attracted NeoPlatonists, cabbalists, alchemists and magicians such as Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno, John Dee and Edward Kelly, and many others whose works were well known to Ted and (perhaps to a lesser degree) to Sylvia. The language of these magicians was often deliberately arcane: a secret language of sigils and signs, recognizable only to those who used them.

The language which Sylvia divined "in the elm" was unique to her. And the spirit of Daddy, which she called up "in broad daylight" with the words she found and inscribed at her desk, was incomprehensible to Ted. After Sylvia's death, without her energies and her "cursing and imploring" words, the code she used became "scrambled" and the magic no longer worked. So the "sigils" and the stains she left behind on her desk became powerless fragments of the words she "engraved" there, and their significance, now, is lost on the "peanut-crunchers" (those who have made Sylvia their idol and for whom any object associated with her is a "curio", an amusement) who come only to "stare".

Nevertheless, although emptied of Sylvia's magic, Ted would have been superstitiously aware of the dangers the table still posed to him. It is an old superstition that any object holding someone's body fluids may be used by a magician or witch to harm that person. So, in the final lines of the poem Ted ensured that the elm table-top was submerged in the salt waters of "the Atlantic" and "scoured" free of any traces of his own bodily fluids and of all the energies which he (at that time misguidedly) had invested in it. After such literal and poetic cleansing it would be again "simply a board".

The final poem on the path of Death, in the dark World of Assiah, is 'Life after Death' (BL 182-3). It is a poem full of pain, grief and torment and yet it is full of beauty. Death took Sylvia, body and soul, into the Otherworld; and it overturned the world of her loved-ones, too. The hard bones and the wounds from Death's scythe, the agonizing pain of separation, and the chaos of the afterlife, affected them all.

Sylvia already knew all about this sort of life after death from the death of her father. Now, she was truly experiencing Death's Otherworld. So what could Ted tell her about life after death that she did not already know?

Nothing.

And nothing is exactly what this poem is about: the emptiness of loss, the chaos of raw emotion, the silence of the Void, and the closed circle of eternity – of the tail-eating snake Uroborus which symbolizes nature's endless cycles of death and rebirth. This is the "Power of Nature" which is represented by the Mystical number of Netzach in this World of Assiah where 7 is now four times magnified ($7 + 7 + 7 + 7 = 28$). And Nature's power can be seen in the things which Sylvia's children inherited from her: the epicanthic fold and the jewel-like eyes of her son; and the terrible wound of childhood loss which she passes (in this poem) to her daughter.

It is as if the spirits of Ted and the children were so bound up with Sylvia's spirit, that Death took them all into the Void; and the pain of separation was most nakedly seen in the youngest, where life was still almost wholly made up of instinct and emotion. But the spirits of all three were still tethered to bodies which "day by day" still ate and slept and grew. Ted describes his own spirit, in the careful ambiguity of the words "dropped from life", as both suspended from life and suspended by life. He fed the baby, dressed and comforted his daughter, but was merely "awake in" his body and responding automatically to their needs.

The thread which ties the spirit to the body is immensely strong. It is the silver thread of Ecclesiastes (12:6) which is broken by death; the thread woven by the Greek Fates, which can only be cut by Atropos, the terrible goddess of the Old Moon, daughter of Night. It is also the soft, almost unbreakable thread with which the Norse gods tethered the Chaos of Nature, in the form of the great wolf, Fenrir, who was born of the Hag, Hel. No ordinary chain could hold him. Only one made of the essences of Nature: "the miaul of a cat, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the tendons of a bear, the breath of a fish and the spittle of a bird"¹⁰.

So, the spirits of the wolves of the world, the offspring of Fenrir, are tethered by Nature to their bodies of fur and flesh and they howl for eternity¹¹ and for their lost freedom. And so, in Ted's poem, it is the wolves in the zoo, their spirits tethered by Nature and their bodies caged by Man, who share the life after death of Sylvia's loved-ones. All through the wintry moon-months of February and March they sang. And the three humans, each tethered to their own body, each in their separate "cots", were comforted by this shared music of mourning, which wrapped around them and wove them back into the web of Nature.

Ted weaves the sad, beautiful, healing music of the wolves into five lines near the end of his poem. There, he and the children are united with Sylvia under blankets of snow.

And, in the final five lines, Ted describes how his body, but not his spirit, sank into a folk-tale of wolves and forest, orphaned babes and a dead mother. It is an old tale, woven from patterns of life which were for generations so common to the peoples of Europe that we easily recognize its images and become part of the story¹².

Even in folk-tales, however, the mother's corpse, as in the very last line of Ted's poem, remains a harsh, unchangeable fact. So, in fiftieth line¹³ of this last poem on this Path of Death (Nun), the Gates of Understanding have led both Ted and Sylvia to the eternal and ineluctable presence of Death. And to the understanding that we are all, indeed, Joined to Nature.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Each of the seven Sephiroth which lie below the Supernal Triangle of Sephira 1, 2 and 3, contains a reflection of the whole lower Tree (Sephiroth 1 to 4). So, the number 49 represents all the energies of the lower Tree, and the forty-nine levels of Wisdom which, if correctly learned and used will allow the Initiate to penetrate the Veil of Binah and become One with the Divine Source. Through the powers of 7, therefore, the Initiate may emergence from chaos into order and complete the Cabbalistic journey.
2. 'Myth and Education', *Children's Literature in Education*, March 1970, 1 :55 -70. 'Myth and Education', *Writers, Critics, and Children*, Heinemann, 1976 - republished in *Winter Pollen*, Faber, 1994 (pp. 136 -153). These two essays are quite different, although the theme is the same.
3. The use of Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the electrocution of the Rosenbergs, were events which caused Sylvia great distress and helped to precipitate the suicidal despair which resulted in her own subjection to the "lightning" of electric shock therapy.
4. Ted Hughes, 'The Loon', *Under The North Star*, Faber, 1981.
5. Given the events in Manhattan on 11 Sept. 2001, it is tempting to see the dream which Ted describes in 'The Badlands' as prophetic but he, I think, would have seen this act of terrorism as a symptom of our sickness, not as Nature's attempt to redress a material/spiritual imbalance, however real that may be. 'The Badlands', however, does deal with the spoiling of "Planetary America" by excessive worship of the sun, of rationality and of materialism. "The moonland" has gone underground, and the old Indian who is linked with the mighty force of Nature at the end of the poem seems to represent a people who once lived in harmony with the land but who now exist only in memory and vision.
6. Faas, UU 206.
7. Letter from Ted Hughes to "Andrea and Robert", dated 16 June 1998. Ted sent a copy of this letter to Keith Sagar and this is currently amongst the Hughes / Sagar correspondence held by the British Library. I quote from my own copy of this letter.
8. The exact dimensions of Dee's table were dictated to his scribe, Edward Kelly, by the angelic spirit, Nalvage. The angels Nalvage and Gabriel also dictated the 'table', or

matrix, of 49 squares (7 x 7) containing the names of the 49 angelic powers or “voices” which they described as “the natural keys, to open...the Gates of Understanding”. (Fenton (Ed.), *The Diaries of John Dee*, Day Books, Oxfordshire, 1998. p. 118). And, as Ted tells us in ‘Fairy Tale’ (BL 159) forty-nine was also Sylvia’s “magic number”.

9. ‘German’ and ‘germane’ were once interchangeable words.

10. Graves, *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, Hamlyn, 1959. p. 226).

11. One of the few poems which Ted wrote in the months after Sylvia’s death was ‘The Howling of Wolves’ (Wodwo 178). In it he writes that the wolf “is living for the earth” and, so, “must feed its fur”. The poem takes its title from one of William Blake’s ‘Proverbs of Hell’: “The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man”.

12. It is not surprising that Ted should have thought of his situation in terms of a folk-tale. In a letter which he wrote to a friend shortly after Sylvia’s death he talked of the way he had become an actor in the dramas other people invented for him. Some, for example, expected him to die of remorse: others that he should live on as curator of Sylvia’s shrine. Life, he wrote, had become complicated and tricky.

13. The grouping of lines in ‘Life after Death’ reflects all the important Cabbalistic numbers associated with the Path of Nun: 2, which reflects the dichotomies of Life/Death, Inner/Outer, Body/Spirit; 12 and 10 both of which signify the completion of a cycle; 4, which is the number of the elements of chaos from which all things are made; 5, the number of Mankind, the number from which the two paths (outer and inner) open; and 50, the number of the Path of Nun and the number of the Gates of Understanding.

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Temperance card
Samekh path
The Path of Temperance – Samekh

Tarot card 14. Tree Path 15.

Joining Sephiroth 6 (Tiphereth) and 9 (Yesod).

‘The Owl’, ‘Fishing Bridge’, ‘Apprehensions’, ‘The Hands’.

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Tomb – Womb – Moon: the power of that round vowel at the heart of these three pervades the Path of Temperance. It holds the infinite zero of the Void, which is also the Nothing from which the Divine Spark created All in our universe. So, after death, after the dissolution of the body to bone-seed and watery chaos, new life begins again in the tomb-womb of Earth.

Harmony, balance and unity must first be restored. On this Path, where the Moon of Yesod is joined with the Sun of Tiphereth on the central Pillar of Balance, and both receive energies directly from the Divine Source through Kether at the Crown of the Tree, all contraries are reconciled. So, body and spirit, human and divine, male and female, intuition and will, and all such (seeming) dualities are united and become part of the whole.

On this Path, too, the image of the bow is of great importance. It is the hunter’s bow of the Moon Goddess, Diana; the starry bow of the Archer, Sagittarius, whose astrological path this is; the rainbow of the goddess Iris; and the rainbow of colours which mark the completion of an alchemical transmutation. Arrow and bow, potential energy and motive force, spirit and will, are no longer separate but connected halves of a potential whole, like the sperm and the egg which must merge before being animated by the Divine Spark of life. So, the arrow becomes a symbol of “directed Will” and the occult significance of this on this Path of Samekh, according to Crowley, is that the arrow, figuratively wielded by Sagittarius, pierces the rainbow represented by the Hebrew letters for the last three Paths on the Cabbalistic Tree and foreshadows “the light of Truth”¹. Foreshadowing and foresight are part of the circling life-energies of this Path.

In Alchemy, in the Bible and in ancient myths of the Great Deluge, the end of death and chaos is marked by the appearance of a rainbow which signifies both a new beginning and the imminence of the Divine in our material world. In the rainbow, Fire and Water combine with Air to form an arch which joins Heaven and Earth: thus, a circle is completed and the four elements – the alchemical Mothers – are held temporarily in a balance which contains all potential for new life.

The same symbolism pervades the Traditional Tarot card for the Path of Temperance. The Rainbow Goddess, Iris, Heavenly messenger of both Zeus and Juno, is shown standing on Earth. In each hand she holds a golden cup (two symbols of Fire) between which Water flows through Air, in a continuous, magically suspended stream. Thus, she brings all four elements together and, at the same time, her body, her arms, the cups and the water, make a continuous circle which, like the Uroborus of Nature, contains All and Nothing.

This womb-shaped circle is seen again in the shape of the Hebrew letter for this Path, Samekh, which means ‘prop’ or ‘support’; and one Cabbalistic meditation for this Path is ‘The Womb protecting Life’. Also, the numbers associated with both the Tarot card of Temperance (fourteen) and the Cabbalistic Path of Samekh (fifteen) figuratively

demonstrate this Divine support: 14 shows the Divine (represented by 1) alongside the 4 of the elements and the material world; 15, shows the Divine beside the 5 of the pentagram which, for Cabbalists, commonly symbolizes Mankind (often the Cabbalists' pentagram shows Man spread eagle in its five-pointed star).

So, for the Cabbalistic journeyer on this Path of Temperance, Divine support is close at hand and there is the potential for creating new wholeness at the start of a new, interior journey. However, a second meditation for this Path, 'Self Control and Self Sacrifice', suggests the care which he or she must take to achieve a balance between the human and the Divine. Temperance is essential if the Divine energies which are shown to the traveller on this Path are to be well used.

The Birthday Letters poem on the Path of Temperance in the Atziluthic World is 'The Owl' (BL 33). The time the poem describes is Spring 1956 and, as noted in my discussion of 'Fate Playing' in the previous chapter, Ted and Sylvia were so newly united by love at this time that each, in 'The Owl', begins to see the world through the eyes of the other.

Suitably, on this Path, they are bonded together like the alchemical hermaphrodite (which is associated with this Path) and each becomes like a child again through this new, shared experience. Sylvia, joyous as any new mother, is enthralled by the natural world which Ted helps her to discover: and he becomes a young, "dumb, ecstatic" boy again as he sees his world of Nature anew through Sylvia's eyes. The repetition of "your eyes" and "your children's eyes" at the ends of the first and second lines of the poem emphasizes the child-like quality of their vision and their response to this newness. As always in this Atziluthic World they are still childish-Foolish adventurers at the start of their Cabbalistic journey. And temperance was clearly a virtue which had still to be learned, as Sylvia's rapturous letter to her mother about Ted and love and Grantchester, and "baby owls, cows and even a water-rat", clearly shows (SPLH 3 May 1956).

In the second line of the poem, Ted notes, too, that this experience will come full circle for him when his world is renewed again through their children's eyes, but his choice of pronoun here ("your" rather than "our") suggests an ominous foreshadowing of Sylvia's death, which would permanently separate them.

Throughout the poem, however, Ted and Sylvia are very much alive, although the whole atmosphere is one of Mercurial dream-like "hypnagogic" ecstasy. The world is suddenly "foreign", a mystery full of "aliens" and "reflections" a place in which common things seem unearthly, and Sylvia's "incredulous" frenzy of joy makes Ted "giddy". This (as in other Birthday Letters poems, such as 'Epiphany' BL 113) is the moony, magical, trance-like atmosphere in which the Mother Goddess demonstrates her power to her human followers. And it is her creature, the owl, which gives this poem its title and which appears at the poem's climax.

Inanna picture

Long before 'Iris' became the name of the Rainbow Goddess, she was known as

'Inanna', then as 'Ishtar'. In Bronze Age, Sumerian myth she wielded first the rainbow necklace, then the bows and arrows of war; and amongst her many titles she was 'Great Mother', 'Queen of the Great Above and the Great Below' and 'Divine Lady Owl'². So, here, on Iris's Path, the Goddess's owl appears. But its message is ambiguous.

Throughout this poem it is clear that nature is Ted's world. He was the "midwife" of all the natural wonders which enthralled them both, and it was he who used an old hunter's trick (sucking his knuckle to imitate the cry of a distressed rabbit) to call the owl to them out of the copse. Sylvia's poem, 'Faun' (SPCP 35) describes this incident and makes Ted, in the final lines, a horned god like Cernunnos, galloping "woodward" in the starlit night. But the owl in Ted's poem swoops up and splays its pinions into his face, as if in warning. It does not take him for a god, or even for a human, but "for a post" – a senseless block of wood; an object which might be used for its own purposes. The anti-climax of this final phrase is a curiously deflating comment on what Ted has just called "My masterpiece".

At the time, the appearance of the owl, apparently at Ted's bidding, was a wonder which clearly impressed both Ted and Sylvia. But the owl is also associated with Hecate, the Moon Goddess as Hag, and because of this it has the folklore reputation of being a harbinger of death. In this poem, and on this Path where the future is held in potential in the womb-like circle, the owl's warning must be taken seriously. Ted already seems to have foreshadowed Sylvia's death at the start of the poem: at its end, with the owl's warning, he completes the circle.

In 'The Owl', however, death is as shadowy as the echo of 'corpse' in the "copse" in which Ted's owl was "enquiring". No warning is spelt out. And it is worth noting that in all Ted's owl poems³ the owl is an ambivalent creature which combines beauty and blessings with fearsomeness and death⁴. Ted and Sylvia, in 'The Owl', were still in the Atziluthic World and at the start of their shared journey. Nothing, yet, was certain. The owl's appearance, then, as they made their way along the Path of Temperance for the first time, on the threshold of exploring their unconscious, inner worlds, was a sign from the Goddess that she would be with them from then on. But even in this, because of her power and because of her many aspects, there was a warning.

'Fishing Bridge'(BL 87-88) which is the poem on this Path in the World of Briah, sees Ted and Sylvia again as "naive pioneers" on a new threshold. The word 'threshold' recurs twice in the first seven lines of the poem. And it recurs twice more as they, in their boat between two banks of the river, on their journey across Americas between two stages of their lives, exist for a brief period in a state where all choices about their future, many "glittering" offers, and "too many thresholds", are open to them.

At this moment of suspension in their lives, Ted describes their "precautions" about their situation as "petty". And the ambiguity of "to keep our skulls clear of the whizzing leads" deliberately and carefully conflates actual and metaphorical meanings. So, realistic as Ted's picture is of himself and Sylvia fishing in Yellowstone Park, in danger of being hit

on the head by the lead fishing-weights of holiday anglers, they may also be seen trying to keep their heads empty of the many colourful (but weighty) choices and leads (or directions) being offered to them by others.

At this time, too, Ted and Sylvia, were “holiday anglers” in more senses than one. Not only were they catching “weary” fish with “little finesse”, they were also fishing for the right path by which to achieve their goals and, in the process perhaps (since this is the fluid, creative World of Bria), catching a few “limited” poems such as those which Sylvia described in her journal as “exercises” [her punctuation] (SPJ 13 Oct. 1959).

There in Yellowstone, a wilderness in the land which they had once thought of as their “Promised Land”, Nature showed them her abundance. The “massed” waters which in Ted’s sequence River are “the generator”, “the chrism of birth” and “the sun’s oiled snake” (‘Flesh of Light’ R 16) flow beneath their boat, in ‘Fishing Bridge’, like life-blood from “a cut throat”. Nature beckons them with her “infinite endowment”. And the “brilliantly lit” potential for happiness and abundance which surrounds this threshold at the start of this poem is as emblematic as the opening page of Blake’s Gates of Paradise⁵, on which he depicted the rising sun arched like a bridge between “The Gates” and “Paradise”.

But Ted and Sylvia were still distracted by worldly things. Ted remembers a sun-lit moment when Sylvia, almost naked, full of delight, nearly “stepped into America”; and his use of ‘America’ here, clearly has symbolic meaning. So, his image is of Sylvia, almost soul naked, about to step in to Paradise: and the bikini she wears is the only remaining fragment of her present life and of the social conventions which she and Ted were trying to shrug off. But she, then both of them, “turned back”.

From the start of the poem Ted has emphasized their inexperience – that they did not know what they were seeing. Everything lay before them, and Nature “leaned over” the threshold to show them the “bounty” to which they, like the trout, could be led. But not only were they half-blinded by too many “glittering” offers, they deliberately held their eyes open to one compelling offer made by a voice which promised to lead them to their “true selves”. Instead, it led them into darkness and, finally, to Sylvia’s death.

In retrospect, in ‘Fishing Bridge’, Ted questions everything about that voice. He questions its nature, its directions, its promises and even the premises on which these promises were based. “What voice” was it? Why should they seek their “true selves” or their souls in the labyrinth? Why should they “search and search”? What does open at the heart of the maze? In the poem, he associates the voice only with darkness, confusion, dreams and hypnosis: it is “masterful”, the voice of a “monomaniac” who has “never heard of the shining lake” which Nature had shown them. And the doorway to which it directed them led only to “crying and loss”.

It may seem to the reader of Birthday Letters that this voice could belong only to Sylvia’s father, Otto, who is associated throughout the book with labyrinths, darkness and death. Why, then, does Ted not say so?

Judging by what Ted wrote elsewhere, it was not that simple.

In his essay, 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals'(WP 177 -190), Ted wrote that he and Sylvia had occasionally consulted the Ouija board in the "late fifties" (the time of this poem) and that spirits would arrive with messages for Sylvia "from Prince Otto", a "great power in the underworld". Prince Otto, she was told, took orders from the Colossus. This Colossus, Ted wrote, became "more and more central" to Sylvia's poetry and to the process of "Self-individuation" which she underwent between 1953 and 1959; and he describes this process as weirdly autonomous, a sort of biological necessity "beyond her manipulative interference" (WP 180-1). All this became the subject matter for Sylvia's poetry, although she felt its control over her as tyrannical.

Even after the "rebirth" which Ted noted in 'The Stones'(SPCP 136 - 7), and which Sylvia wrote at Yaddo just after their journey across America, Sylvia's journal shows her still driven to search for her true Self and still obsessed with her own creative inadequacies. According to Ted's interpretation, all of Sylvia's writing until just before her death was about her past and her struggle for Self. Only in late 1961 did Sylvia's newborn Poetic Self "feel the draught from the outer world" but even then it was fleeting, and Sylvia plunged back into her inner world, which found its strongest expression in her Ariel poems. Ted, sleepwalking alongside Sylvia (as he says in '9 Willow Street'(BL 74)), was also "hypnotized" by the inner voice which drove her and together they groped, searched and struggled according to its uncertain directions. All their attention was focussed on the past and on their present search: it was "not for the future", and for Sylvia, there would not be any future, because this "dark and difficult" doorway through which the voice took them led only to her death. No wonder, in 'Fishing Bridge', Ted questions everything about that voice.

Was it the voice of a spirit? If so, Sylvia internalized it to the extent that it drove her without any recourse to the Ouija board. Or was it Sylvia's own inner Poetic Self struggling for release and finally achieving it through Ariel? Was searching and searching for their "true selves", then, the right path to "perfected vision"? Perhaps not. The maxim 'Know thyself!', which is part of all spiritual quests, does not mean you should focus solely on yourself and search only for your own perfection. On the contrary, it means accepting yourself as you are, understanding your abilities and your limitations, stripping away all selfish, material desires and humbly submitting yourself to the guidance of the Divine.

Yet, it seems in 'Fishing Bridge' that both Sylvia and Ted had little choice but to follow the voice. They were inexperienced, did not recognize the support (the prop, Samekh) of the Divine already beside them (as Nature showed it to them); and the voice tempted them on by promising them all they thought they should be seeking. The lessons which they still had to learn, it seems, were the strength to resist temptation (and Sylvia, as her journal entries show, was still very much in thrall to material ambitions), the ability to recognize an intemperate path, and the need to be constantly awake and alert. The voice, in a sense, was that of their own inner demons, and it no more knew the correct

path than they did, hence the “dead ends” and “reversals” they encountered.

In the final lines of the poem, Ted writes not of “the thing” I found, but of “the thing we had found”. Grammatically, that ‘we’ links Ted to the voice – he is gripped by it and forced to confront this “thing” – but throughout the poem “we” refers to Ted and Sylvia. So, the discovery seems to encompass all three, and the thing “we had found”, was that this search ended with Sylvia’s death. So even in these lines there is a question: was this the maze’s centre? All the questions suggest that Ted felt that the path they had chosen was not the right path.

At the centre of any maze one is forced to stop, at least briefly in order to turn about. But in all the questing myths the hero eventually returns. There may be a monster, and death often has to be faced, but with Divine help the monster is killed, the maze is re-negotiated, and the hero is reborn into the light. In ‘Fishing Bridge’ there is no monster, only Sylvia, dead, dead, dead (the word is repeated three times in these last lines). But the questions remain. Was this the heart of the maze? Was this what they were meant to discover? We are given no answer. Sylvia’s eyes, those mirrors of the soul, are as brown-bright as they were when she and Ted were shown Nature’s glory at the start of the poem – as they were when he and she were “nearly happy” - but now they are “unmoving and dead”. So, the awful finality of this final line brings the poem, all the potential for joy with which the poem began, their search, “everything”, to a full stop.

‘Apprehensions’(BL 140), on the Path of Temperance in the World of Yetzirah, shares its title with a poem Sylvia wrote and dated 28 May 1962 (SPCP 195 - 6). Both poems reflect the multiple meanings of ‘Apprehend’, dealing with fear of approaching dangers; with things grasped by the mind, whether real or imaginary; and with arrest: both the need to stop these dangers in their tracks and prevent them causing harm, and the physical arrest of breath, thought and creativity which fear brings.

Four Worlds picture

Sylvia’s poem, interestingly, reflects the four Cabbalistic Worlds as the Worlds of the alchemical Mothers – Fire, Air, Water and Earth – as if overlapped on a single Tree⁶. The first stanza of Sylvia’s poem deals with the fiery heavens of sun and of the stars and angels, which she calls her “medium”, suggesting that she her spirit communicates with them. The second stanza is associated with the mind and the airy, creative world of ideas. The third with the world of the material body (what Sylvia describes is what we all are “made of”, and we are 70% water); and the fourth with the black, earthy, underworld of death. But in all four stanzas she confronts a wall which she cannot surmount; and she apprehends physical and emotional horrors, the closeness of death and, finally, the rapid approach of emptiness, “cold blanks”, the Void.

In Cabbala, on this current Path, Sylvia was in a place where the two lowest Cabbalistic Worlds overlap and Yesod (Sephira 9), at one end of her Path, was at the bottom of the Yetziritic World in which she moved but was overlapping the heart of the lowest World of Assiah. In addition to this, although Yesod is connected directly through Tiphereth to Kether at the Crown of the Tree, it also receives energies directly from Malkuth

(Sephioroth 10) at the bottom of the Tree, on the edge of the Void. Yesod, therefore, is not only the Sephiroth which the Cabbalistic journeyer approaches with the accumulated understanding of their journey along the earlier Paths, and the place where Divine support is shown to them, it is also (especially towards the very end of their journey, as they probe deeper into the dark unconscious within and around them) a place where the demons of darkness are very close.

Yesod is the 'Foundation', "the most occult of the Sephiroth"⁷, and the most subtle and the most magical of them. Its Spiritual Experience is the 'Vision of the Machinery of the Universe', so it is here that nature shows her bounty. But Yesod is also a place of intuition, clairvoyance and illusion. Its Qlippoth are 'Bad Foundations' and 'Dependence'; and the latter, in extreme cases, may even become a state of possession.

So, the apprehensions which are the subject and title of both Sylvia's and Ted's poems, have specific Cabbalistic meaning. Ted's poem, in particular, shows Sylvia's awareness of and fear of being possessed by some malevolent force; and it suggests the nature of the energies she seemed to be channelling through her pen into her work.

But Sylvia's poem, too, shows not only her own dark 'Vision of the Machinery of the Universe', but that she was aware of a threatening "well" of darkness always behind her, and of "unidentifiable birds" whose cries portended final nothingness. Her fear drove her to write, and this fear possessed her: so, as in the first line of Ted's poem, her writing "was also" her fear. It threatened her with the loss of everything she held dear, and it coloured her world (Ted says) to the extent that she could feel it, taste it, hear it in everything she did; and see it in every object which had special meaning for her. Her pen in particular, through which her subconscious, poetical energies were directed onto her pages (as if through a magician's wand), became "black, fat" and sinister. And with such apprehensions – such a concept of the possible function of her pen and of the "goblins" which might "burst out" of it – she would "stop", arrested by these thoughts but also deliberately arresting them "mid-word".

'Self Control and Self Sacrifice Govern the Wheel': and on this Path Temperance is all important. Sylvia, clearly, was able to exert control, to stop writing, and to choose and shape the words. Her fear was no longer simply a subconscious drive but something of which she was consciously aware and which Ted links in the poem to all her senses, and to all the physical objects which were important to her. Sylvia, now, was courageously willing to confront that fear and to hazard all she held dear.

On this particular Path, it is important to note that Sylvia's courage and her words were a product of both energy and will. The spirit which inspired her (or which, perhaps, she allowed to possess her) stood in relation to her as the number one stands to the number five on this Path. It was there for support (however good or bad the result) and although she could not ignore its promptings she could choose to direct it in whatever way she wished. Temperance should have governed all her choices and actions, but it did not: she chose not only to let the angry words flow intemperately but to publish them as well.

With such a bad Foundation on this Path there could be no end but the one Sylvia intuitively foresaw and feared. So, everything was taken from her, even the favourite pen through which those energies had flowed under her hand. And the pen's removal by "somebody" unknown or un-named, in the final line of Ted's poem, not only emphasizes the totality of Sylvia's loss, it also suggests that there was some residual power in the pen which continued to inflict hurt even after her death. So, Ted ritually breaks any possible connection between such a power and Sylvia by confining the pen and the person who took it to a single, isolated, line at the poem's end.

In the lower World of Assiah, the World of Shells, the poem on this Path is 'The Hands'(BL 184 - 5). It begins with live, supportive and nurturing hands but ends with "empty gloves".

In this poem, possession or loss of control, which is the Qlippoth of Yesod, overwhelms Sylvia. And perhaps this was caused by the Illusion of Yesod, an illusion of 'Identity', because her identity became that of the voice which spoke through her poetry: the voice of Ariel, which was a powerful and courageous voice but also an intemperate voice of anger and revenge. That was the voice in her poems, the angry voice in her "last-stand letters", the voice she directed at Ted. It was the inner voice to which she listened, and, like fingerprints, it was unique.

But did this voice belong to the being whose hands "dandled" her in her infancy and helped her in her suicide attempt in 1953? Throughout the poem, the hands belong to some "other" whose identity is un-named but whose power is "immense". And Sylvia was its chosen vehicle, although, looking back, Ted "sometimes" thought he, too, was used by it.

Sylvia herself wrote of the immensity of her father. He was the one who, thinly disguised in one of her stories, "tossed her up in the air" and caught her; "a giant of a man" whose judgement was never mistaken ('Among the Bumblebees' JPBD 259). He was Prince Otto and Kollossus, whose spirit directions she followed when she wrote 'Lorelei'(SPCP 94 and note p. 287) 8. It was he who became her "bullman" ('The Beast' SPCP 134) and the Daddy she tried to get "back, back, back to" (SPCP 224).

Perhaps indirectly, through the psychological wound which his death caused, Sylvia's father's hands were associated with her suicide attempt, but in her journal entries immediately before that attempt she argued with herself as if with some being within her who controlled her emotions and feelings. Rationally, she told herself to stop being frightened, to fight her anger at her mother and her desire to "escape", "to retreat in to not caring [sic.]" (SPJ 14 July 1953). But rationality cannot always control our feelings and desires. What Sylvia desired was quiet, and in Ted's poem the hands "quietly / "Positioned" her and "fed" her in her desperate attempt to achieve this.

In fact, of course, the hands which did all this were Sylvia's. So, as part of her recovery she "got help" to try and understand what she had done and why. The stories and

journal entries in which Sylvia tells something of that first suicide attempt and of the help she later received from doctors and psychiatrists, suggests that she learned that what drove her was suppressed anger. They suggest that she learned that her anger was caused by her father's death, her mother's control, her resentment of society's expectations of her; and that to be healed, she must release that buried anger. What she learned (and perhaps "could not believe", although she tried to), was based on of the prevailing practice of psychological analysis and treatment.

And Sylvia did learn to release her anger in her writing, but it did not diminish her sense of some 'Other' within her whose control she feared and fought against, and whose presence does, indeed, lie in many of her poems like fingerprints in gloves. Sometimes that 'Other' is male, as in 'Full Fathom Five' (SPCP 92 - 93), 'Electra on Azalea Path' (SPCP 116 - 7), and 'Daddy'; sometimes female, as in 'The Disquieting Muses' (SPCP 74 - 6) and 'Medusa' (SPCP 224 - 6). But in 'Poem for a Birthday' (SPCP 131 - 136) Sylvia recognized it as the Goddess, "Mother of otherness", "the one mouth" to whom, in a poetic and metaphorical recreation of her earlier suicide attempt, she fed herself in a process of poetic rebirth. This goddess is Iris / Inanna, whose great hands control the waters of life (as they do on the Tarot card for this Path) and whose powers are bound up with the mystery of life and death: the mystery of Self, of instinct and will, conscious and unconscious, self-control and self-sacrifice.

Throughout Birthday Letters, Ted has suggested that Sylvia embodied the Goddess. In 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals', he also suggested that the 'Other' was her buried Poetic Self, fuelled by the Goddesses energies, which struggled for release. He charted the internal struggle for healing which Sylvia went through as she released and confronted the "The Other – the deathly woman at the heart of everything". And he described Sylvia's poetry as "the biology of Ariel, the ontology of Ariel" and Sylvia's "whole oeuvre" as the expression of "a continuous hermetically sealed process of change" which "dominated her life" (WP 178 - 9).

It was the Mother Goddesses energies which both Ted and Sylvia glimpsed in 'The Badlands': the all-enveloping snake energies which come, as Ted wrote elsewhere, from "the core of life like the black, ultimate resource of the organism" and which are, paradoxically, the source of all healing⁹. It was exactly this sort of healing which Ted described Sylvia as seeking through her poetry; and he described the driven, "singularity" of her work as a mystery, but one which expressed her "bee-line instinct... for nursing and repairing the damaged and threatened nucleus of the self"¹⁰.

It was the Goddesses energies, then, which Ted believed drove Sylvia to write; and it was the Goddesses energies, which found their strongest expression in the voice of Ariel, which are still to be found like fingerprints in Sylvia's poems, letters and stories. Ted wrote of Sylvia's courage as she underwent the struggle to release and control these energies within her, and of the eventual birth of "a new self-conquering self" in the Ariel poems. But he wrote, too, of her "ultimate defeat". And "Finally", looking back as he wrote 'The Hands', it seemed to him that evidence of the controlling presence of the Goddess was there inside everything both he and Sylvia did in the last months of her

life. Sylvia, exhausted, had relinquished control; he, numbed by everything which was happening, was unwary. So, the Goddess possessed them both.

Ted's poem ends with Sylvia's death. She and all the energies she embodied have vanished like the living hands which shaped her work. What remains, are "gloves", shells, poems and stories within which only traces of her unique energies remain, like fingerprints. And Ted's use of the phrase "these, here" conveys the belief that it is the nature of all creative work, including his own poem on this printed page before the reader, to share that fate.

The best that can be hoped for, is that the Goddess inspires and supports the poet in a dynamic, fluid dance of shared powers until the poem is written. After that, it becomes something fixed, which contains only traces of the energies which created it. In different words, but ones which Ted used in his interview with Ekbert Faas in 1970, once the poem is written the ritual is over and "the work goes dead". "In the end", Ted said then, "one's poems are ragged dirty undated letters from remote battles and weddings and one thing and another"¹¹.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Crowley discussed the arrow in detail in Chapter XIV of *The Book of Thoth*, pp. 101 - 139. It is also part of his vision (pp. 139 - 142) but its significance there is occult and personal.
2. 'Ninna' is the Sumerian word for owl, and Inanna was also known as 'Nin-ninna'. Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, Viking, 1991, p. 216.
3. For example, 'The Snowy Owl' in *Under the North Star*, p. 16; 'Owl' in *What is the Truth?*, pp. 96-7; 'Owl' in *The Cat and the Cuckoo*, p. 24.
4. This is especially so in 'The owl-flower' in the *Alchemical Cave Drama of Cave Birds*, which occupies a place in that sequence which is almost exactly parallel to that of the Path of Temperance on the Cabbalistic Tree. I discuss the alchemical meaning of this poem in detail in *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest*, pp. 129 - 130.
5. The illustration I refer to is in William Blake's later version of *The Gates of Paradise*. This book was an emblem book depicting a spiritual journey as a journey through life and in the later version, which Blake intended "For the Sexes" rather than "For Children", he included two pages on which he listed "The Keys of the Gates".
6. It is quite usual for the four Worlds to be linked with the four Mother elements in this way. And, since the four Cabbalistic Worlds always overlap, it is quite common for them to be shown on a single, compound Sephirothic Tree, with the Atziluthic World occupying the topmost part of the Tree and the World of Assiah at the bottom. Only in the Atziluthic World and in the World of Assiah do parts of the Sephirothic Tree not overlap but extend, respectively, into the Heavens or into the Underworld.

7. Colin Low's discussion of Yesod is very detailed and he calls it this. Notes on Kabbalah p. 36.

8. SPJ 4 July 1958 and 9 July 1958.

9. 'The Hanged Man and the Dragonfly', WP 92.

10. 'Sylvia Plath and her Journals', WP 179-9.

11. Faas, UU 204 - 5.

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The Path of The Devil – A'Ain

Tarot card 15. Tree Path 16.

Joining Sephiroth 6 (Tiphereth) and 8 (Hod).

'A Pink Wool Knitted Dress', 'The 59th Bear', 'Dream Life', 'The Prism'.
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On the lower Paths of the Tree, below the Sephira of Tiphereth (6), lie the Paths of the unconscious, primordial energies. Samekh, the Path of Temperance, was dominated by the life-force of the Great Goddess who, in Alchemy, is represented by the female half of the Alchemical Hermaphrodite. Now, on the Path of The Devil – the Path of A'Ain, the Hebrew letter for 'Eye' – the Cabbalistic traveller encounters the life-force of the God who is the essential other half of that generative whole.

His energies, like those which we attribute to the Goddess, are a-moral, genderless¹ and supremely powerful. He represents the expansive, driving force of life: She, the conservative, nurturing force. But, like Yin and Yang, these forces are both present in fluctuating measure in each and every living thing. They are the source of our most basic instincts, drives and emotions. They are the so-called 'animal energies' which, in

human society, are frequently regarded as dangerous, unacceptable, sinful even, and are, therefore, subject to proscription and rules.

For Cabbalists and Hermeticists, however, these energies are the spark of the Divine within us which, if we can learn to understand and control it, will give us the power to change both ourselves and our world.

The Cabbalistic journey is just one way of learning to understand these energies. And for those who have chosen this way and who embark on the Path of The Devil, the lessons of earlier Paths must have been well mastered. Only then, will they be able to face the 'Lord of the Gates of Matter', whose energies dominate this Path, in safety, and control his powers within themselves with understanding, strength, love and temperance.

On the Traditional Tarot card, this 'Lord of the Gates of Matter' is shown as Pan Pangenitor, the All-Father, a horned, goat-legged, bat-winged figure similar to that which appears in Christian iconography as the Devil. Loosely tethered to the altar on which Pan stands are two similar but smaller and wingless creatures. Sometimes, in later Tarot packs, these creatures are human – one male and one female – but always they share some of Pan's animal attributes; and always their demeanour is unconcerned, or even happy.

The symbolism of this imagery suggests that we are the offspring of this 'Father' – that we share some of his animal nature and that we are subject to his power. But the details of the image suggests also that either we are unknowingly enslaved by him, or we know of the bonds which bind us and choose to accept them, for the looseness of the bonds shows that we can throw them off.

Pan's energies are lustful, vital, Mercurial energies. They are capricious (Capricorn is the astrological sign for this Path) and have no foresight or scruple. Allowed free reign, they have the power to transcend all limitations and cause chaos and destruction. But they are also the energies of the light-bearer, Lucifer. And without them we are sterile. This paradox was the source of Blake's interpretation of the Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and it is summed up in his aphorism: "The lust of the goat is the bounty of God" (MMH 8c). It is expressed, too, in one Cabbalistic meditation for this Path: 'The Exalted Phallus'.

The sexual energies are, of course, one expression of these generative powers, but that is not the only way in which they are expressed. Because of the power of the sexual drive, however, many spiritual disciplines emphasize its importance, either by prohibition or, as in Tantric Yoga, by exploiting its believed connection with states of divine ecstasy. Cabbala, on the other hand, teaches neither abstinence nor excess (although both are valued) but the overall need for understanding and for equipoise.

Few of the gods associated with this Path, however, have had followers whose rituals demonstrated equipoise, even when those rituals celebrated Divine Mysteries. The

excesses of the Bacchants who worshipped Dionysus, for example, were terrifyingly depicted by Euripides in his Bacchanals. And followers of the ancient goat-headed god, Bahomet, whose name means 'wisdom'², were believed by the Christians to indulge in orgiastic rituals of Devil-worship and sexual abandon. The connections between the Divine Mysteries, ritual, ecstasy, passion and excess, reflect important truths about the generative energies but they reflect, too, the human propensity for creating and enforcing dogma; for accepting its bonds; for mistaking rebellion and license for freedom; and for taking things to extremes.

The Cabbalistic journey, unlike many other spiritual disciplines, is individual and personal. Enlightenment comes through knowledge and understanding, not through the learning of dogma. But understanding of our unconscious is not obtained by conscious, rational means.

Jung wrote that "our conscious mind is far from understanding everything, but the unconscious always keeps an eye on the 'age-old, sacred things'... and reminds us of them at a suitable opportunity" (P&A 67). He believed that this 'suitable opportunity' came in dreams, art, stories and poetry. And for most spiritual disciplines, these have been the time-honoured methods of presenting their teachings: their stories and poetry are full of symbols and allegory, and their sacred texts record many instances of divine enlightenment transmitted through visions and dreams. Eye picture

For the Cabbalist, too, enlightenment comes from visions, dreams, instinct, intuition, imagination and the brief ecstasy or madness of union with the Divine. The A'Ain, the Eye on this Path of the All-Father, is the Visionary eye of the Soul in our inner darkness, and it frequently appears in Cabbalistic, Hermetic and Alchemical iconography as the Eye of God above. It is both the upward-looking eye of the Divine Spark within us and the downward-looking eye of the Ain Soph.

In order to open the inner eye, the Cabbalistic journeyer on this Path must learn to use the energies of Hod, Sephira 8, which lies at one end of this Path, and which transmits all the Mercurial, infinite, tricky, magical, light-bearing energies of the number 8. Then, balanced by the energies of Tiphereth (6), the journeyer may learn to use their Visionary eye to discern the bonds which bind them and to set their own limits and boundaries. Hod, which is on the Pillar of Form, transmits energies which foster abstraction and language, through which (by the use of reason) we construct our own image of our world. The Vision of Hod is the Vision of Splendour; and the Virtue of Hod is honesty and truthfulness. Its Illusion, however, is the illusion of order; and its Qlippoth is rigidity.

The poem on this Path in the Atziluthic World is 'A Pink Wool Knitted Dress' (BL 34 - 5)³. As a description of the formal union of Ted and Sylvia according to the laws of church and state, this poem is as much about social conventions and boundaries as it is about love. And, since this is the Atziluthic World of Archetypes, there is an ironic suggestion of heroic bravado in many of Ted's descriptions of his own actions and there is a gloriously happy, fairy-tale ending for Sylvia.

In the very first lines, Sylvia is “stood at the alter”, accepting her bonds as willingly and happily as the creatures on the Tradition Tarot card for the Path of the Devil. Ted, who at that time had already rebelled against many social conventions, was, he suggests in the poem, “conscripted” and “subjected” to this ceremony; but he was also “levitated” by Sylvia’s passionate, deep and child-like outpouring of joy. And, although the marriage was obviously not planned with any Cabbalistic foresight and the church of St. George-the-Martyr was dictated by circumstances not by choice, the saint to whom this church was dedicated turned out to be fortuitously apt for Ted’s poetic purposes on this particular Cabbalistic Path.

Sylvia, although she was fiercely independent, had grown up in a conventional, church-going, society and had absorbed many of its values. Marriage, as her journals show, was a goal she had actively pursued for many years and her family expected it. Ted’s parents, too, would have expected the couple to marry, although Ted had long rejected most such conventional expectations of him, as his lack of a regular job and his unconventional appearance attested. His clothes, just as he describes them in the poem, were old and shabby, partly due to his lack of money but also, as he acknowledges by calling them “my uniform”, from choice. Amongst his friends, and in the area of London in which he was living at that time, his clothes would have marked him out as a ‘Bohemian’ artist – someone who was more concerned with the life of the mind and spirit than with appearances. And this was part of Ted’s attraction for Sylvia: she wrote to her mother of the her delight in the intensity of Ted and his poet and artist friends; and that they were not part of the “precious hushed literary circles” (SPLH 19 April 1956). Her description of Ted wearing “always the same black sweater and corduroy jacket with pockets full of poems, fresh trout, and horoscopes” (SPLH 29 April 1956) confirms Ted’s note in the poem that he owned only “the odd, spare, identical item” of clothing: but this very replication of certain items suggests the care with which Ted’s “uniform” was chosen.

To Sylvia’s mother, unused in any case to the post-war deprivations still apparent in England⁴, such shabbiness, especially on her daughter’s wedding day, must have been shocking. No wonder Ted describes himself as “the Swineherd” (not the Frog Prince, because he obviously had no intention of being turned into a Prince) stealing all those “pedigree dreams”, which were as much dreams for “this daughter” as they were Sylvia’s dreams for herself. And the ambiguity of these four lines (11 – 14) is telling, for those dreams were not only dreams about Sylvia continuing and/or marrying into inherited excellence – dreams which were stolen from a carefully guarded vision of the future; they were also the best and purest of Sylvia’s dreams, rescued from the guarded, spot-lit, ordered prison of social and family expectations in which they might well have remained. And Ted, the fairy-tale swineherd, the romantic poet-hero of Sylvia’s journals and letters, bravely rescued the maiden from the chains which bound her to that fate, and stole her away.

There are ironic references to mythical heroism, too, in Ted’s emphasis (by isolating it between full stops) on the word ‘Bloomsday’ in the third line of the poem. June 16th was the date of Ted’s and Sylvia’s wedding. It is a date made famous by James Joyce’s

novel *Ulysses*: the date Joyce chose for the one day, mock-heroic journey around Dublin of his modern-day *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom. Joyce chose it to commemorate the first day of his union with Nora Barnacle: and Ted and Sylvia chose it for the official start of their shared heroic journey. But in Ted's poem, Sylvia is the bloom: "a nodding spray of wet lilac": it is her day, and she stands beside him, "so slender and new and naked", brimming with ocean depths of emotion and sobbing with joy. The picture Ted paints is very like Piero di Cosimo's painting of Perseus rescuing Andromeda⁵: A Mercurial Perseus flies through the air, kills the dragon, and frees the naked Andromeda, who is chained to a rock beside a turbulent ocean. The chivalric Saint George, too, is reputed to have rescued a maiden from the dragon, but in his Christian form he is a Roman who was martyred for the purity of his faith, and the maiden doesn't enter the picture.

The strange line "My wedding, like Nature, wanted to hide", seems to suggest that Ted's instinct, like that of an animal faced with entrapment, was to keep his union with Sylvia secret. "However – " (with this use of a dash, rather than a comma, one can almost hear Ted bravely swallowing his principles and preparing to be martyred for love), having agreed to a public ceremony, boldness and naivety (as it turned out) prompted the impulse to opt for the grandest and best: Westminster Abbey, no less! The Dean of Westminster, enforcing church rules, soon put paid to this fanciful notion and brought them down to earth. And there must have been a certain irony for Ted, at least in retrospect as he wrote this poem, in the fact that his Parish Church, in which they "finally squeezed into marriage" (as if into a straight-jacket, perhaps), turned out to be dedicated to St. George-the-Martyr⁶. But it is appropriate for this particular Path, too, that in Christian iconography Saint George, like Saint Michael, is frequently shown vanquishing the Devil-dragon Satan, whose monstrous form represents all the powerful animal appetites of Man.

Sylvia's own descriptions of the wedding in her letter to her brother Warren (SPLH 18 June 1956) and, some months later in her journal (SPJ 25 Feb. 1957), convey something of the "brimming" overflow of joy which Ted describes at the end of his poem, and of her romantic vision of it all. For her, the scene became infused with the "watery yellow-grey light of rainy London". And, in a "secret wedding"⁷, in an "act of faith" based on "nothing but love & hope & our two selves", she became the wife of a "poet and genius".

The contrast between Sylvia's view of the wedding and Ted's (admittedly retrospective) view, is exemplified by the contrast between Sylvia's new, pink dress which, like her joy, is unsmudged by "anything" at all, and Ted's worn out, "used up symbol of a tie". Ted describes his tie as a "veteran": it had, it seems, been retired from active service, having survived Ted's earlier conscription into the RAF for the two-year military training which the British government at that time required all young men to undergo. The echoes of conscription and entrapment attached to this tie suggest what was at that time a commonplace, stereotyped, male view of marriage; as does its colour, for black ties are more usually worn at funerals than at weddings. There are ironic, funereal associations, too, in the requisitioning of "the sexton"⁸ as Best Man, for a sexton would more usually be responsible for the digging of graves than for holding the rings at a stranger's

wedding.

Yet, the innocent romance, and the self-mocking, irony of the picture which Ted paints in 'A Pink Wool Knitted Dress', is undermined throughout the poem by imagery of imprisonment, restriction and death. And at times, elements of Ted's description have alternative meanings which introduce some very dark tones indeed.

Both Ted and Sylvia refer to the church of St. George-the-Martyr as the Church of the Chimney Sweeps. For Sylvia, this seemed a romantic designation, and, indeed, in England a chimney sweep at a wedding was always considered to be a lucky omen⁹. But in Ted's poem, in the context of this particular Path, the chimney sweep is one more symbol of society's suppression and destruction of natural energies. Inside the Church of St. George-the-Martyr, is a nineteenth century plaque which records the donation of £1,000 by a parishioner for the provision of Christmas Dinner for London chimney sweeps. Generous as this seems, it exemplifies the sort of piety of which William Blake wrote so angrily in his poem, 'The Chimney Sweeper' (Songs of Experience). For Blake, the sight and the street-cry of young chimney sweeps was a sign of a sick society in which "God & his Priest & King" made a "heaven" of a child's "misery". In the 1800s, chimney sweeps were children, apprenticed at the age of seven or eight, to climb through the narrow, tortuous, maze-like chimney flues of London houses. Many died of suffocation. By the age of twelve, most had grown too big for this work and they were crippled, stunted and ill, often with cancer of the scrotum. So, that donated Christmas Dinner for chimney sweeps was associated with sorrow not joy; with hell not heaven.

Ted's tone of joking irony in this poem often seems forced. And, although the suggestion that Aurelia Plath's "brave" participation in the wedding was part of a risky "US Foreign Affairs gamble" is amusing, it is hard not to read that isolated word "magnanimity" in line 28 as an expression of anger. Ted's own family (given a line of their own to confirm their importance to him) knew "nothing" at all about this wedding. Nor, even, did "a closest friend", who might have been expected to act as Ted's "squire" in this chivalric scene. And the way in which lines 25 - 39 link this exclusion of his closest family and friends to the "Twist of outrage" (that the constrained children and the caged zoo animals – "All the prison animals" – had to wait in the rain whilst the sexton fulfilled this unexpected legal requirement) reinforces the sense of wrongness.

At the end of the poem, however, all suggestions of wrongness, restriction and bondage are overthrown by Ted's description of Sylvia's joy. The imposed setting, the bleak echoing chancel, all the "meanwhile", makeshift, hurried arrangements, and the doubtful groom – all are transfigured by the sheer depth and passion of Sylvia's overflowing emotions. Ted describes her as "Brimming with God". And it seems that Sylvia, describing her ecstasy, said that she saw a heavenly vision of riches.

As he recreated this scene in his imagination and in his poem, Ted saw again the fires which burned within Sylvia on that day and which she wrestled to control. He saw, too, in her eye pupils (which, traditionally, are the windows of the soul, and which sparkled, as in other Birthday Letters poems, like the flame-tested jewels of the Goddess's eyes)

the treasures which she was offering to him, but which, like dice, were a gamble that promised no certainty of happiness.

The poem which is on The Devil's Path in the World of Briah, is 'The 59th Bear' (BL 89 – 101). The title of Ted's poem is the same as that of Sylvia's story in Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams (94 – 105) and both are based on the couple's encounters with bears in the Yellowstone National Park in July 1959. On 29th July 1959, Sylvia wrote to her mother of a particularly frightening night when a bear broke into their car as they slept beside it in their tent; and of a woman's terrifying account the next day about a camper who had been killed by a bear at a nearby campsite (SPLH 29 July 1959). A few weeks later, at Yaddo, Sylvia tried to re-create the events and feelings of that night in a story in which (in her own words) "a man is killed by a bear, ostensibly because his wife willed it to happen" (SPJ 16 Sept. 1959). But she was dissatisfied with this story, and described it as one of her "pretty artificial statues" which conveyed nothing of the "seethe and deep-grounded swell" of her experience.

Ted's poem, too, describes Sylvia as having "squeezed the possible blood out of" her fiction through her "typewriter ribbon". But Ted's phrasing, in the few lines towards the end of his poem where he says this, is ambiguous; and the story, as he tells it, differs in many small details from that of Sylvia's "fiction" (as he calls it) and from her letter to her mother. Perhaps, on this Path where the 'Virtue' of Hod is truthfulness, Ted was being careful and precise. But it is likely that he was also thinking of something more seriously connected with Sylvia's creative efforts when he altered or corrected (we cannot know which) her version of events.

It is important to remember that Briah is the World in which abstract patterns are formed, and that the energies of Hod, on this particular Path, also foster abstract pattern making. So, for visionary artists and poets who make the Cabbalistic journey, this Path is of major importance, because it is here that their view of the world is shaped and it is this which will eventually find concrete expression in their work. It is here, too, that they must find ways of accessing and using their inner Visionary eye, so that their interpretation of the world will be true, and their work will transmit that truth.

Experiment and flexibility are a necessary and continuing part of this process. And in 1959, both Sylvia and Ted were experimenting with ways of using the powerful unconscious energies within them and around them (that "seethe and deep-grounded swell" of which Sylvia wrote of in her journal) from which they believed true inspiration might flow into their work.

Sylvia's story describes a fictitious husband who, as a boy, had developed a method of "intense prayer", a sort of communion with "the genius of a place", through which he attempted to influence wild animals. In the story, this husband wills all the animals of the forest towards him and he feels guilty when an Elk appears and is pursued by camera-toting tourists. But it is the wife who believes that she has called up the lethal bear "out of the dark"; she calls this bear "my bear" and eggs her husband on to his fatal confrontation with it. Sylvia's story, however, is fiction: and although she commonly

included very personal details in her work, her description of husband and wife, here, cannot be taken as fact.

Ted, however, did use meditation techniques to tap into the net of power which animates the cosmos. He wrote to Lucas Myers: "I am convinced that the powers that matter are not to be recruited by a simple decision to write any more than religious trance is to be induced by a simple wish for divine revelation". And he went on to say, Myers notes, that "one ought to be able to become skilled in productive trance as every commonplace Buddhist monk does"¹⁰. Ekbert Faas, too, in an interview with Ted in 1977, asked about "the sources of exercises in meditation and invocation(/I)" which Ted and Sylvia had "(I)devised in 1959" (UU 210). Ted replied that they came from "the whole body of magical literature which anybody can look up", but he declined to elaborate further. It is interesting to note, however, that in an earlier interview with Faas, in 1970, Ted talked of Tibetan "occult and magical" beliefs, the power of dreams, shamanic flight to the spirit world, and his belief in the shamanic nature of poetry (UU 206).

Bear picture

Ted, through his anthropological studies (and most probably Sylvia, too) would have been aware that for North American Indians the Bear was a shamanic animal. In Yellowstone Park, Ted and Sylvia were in "Red Indian" country, and they were reminded of this by the "robes" and "tepees" of the land itself. But amongst real Red Indian robes and tepees, the shaman was once a very important figure. In a trance induced by drums and dancing, he or she would make the spirit-flight to the Otherworld in order to bring back healing energies for the tribe. And essential to this process was the guidance and protection of an animal which embodied the same raw, powerful, dangerous energies which the shaman was likely to encounter on that journey. To gain that protection, the shaman relied on his kinship with all of nature, but using an animal's power safely was something which had to be learned.

Ted believed that poets and artists make a similar shamanic journey when they delve into the unconscious. But in 1959 he and Sylvia were still learning to do this: still like neophyte shamans who have to learn how to communicate with the Nature-Kin and return from the Otherworld alive. And a real encounter with a wild animal such as a bear is an apt allegory for this dangerous process.

Similarly, the act of containing (or caging) such powerful, unpredictable energies – such "tonnage" – in a poem or story can result in death: what might seem like a simple, controlled process which metaphorically turns "life to paper" may turn out to bleed it of all its energy and power and, so, be lethal. In just the same way, the Yellowstone bears, which appear to be "entertaining" "Uncle Bruins" or "Mislaid Red Indian Mickey Mouse" characters, can turn into wild creatures which, with one blow, can kill, and turn a living person into a memory, an incident report, an obituary.

For the wife in Sylvia's story, the fifty-ninth bear was a "symbol of plenitude" and luck: and five and nine are, indeed, numbers associated with completion and with foresight

and magic. For Ted, in his poem, “our fifty-ninth bear” was murderous, yet it had “romped through the woods” to rob them; it was “a ghoul” whose single talon had wrenched out and shattered their car window, yet it had hidden inches from them, leaving them feeling “dazed” and ego-raked but strangely proud and “chosen”. In contrast to the “Paradise” teddybears, unreally tamed by American society into “welcoming committees” and “camera stars” this bear was real, full of vital energy, and frighteningly mercurial. It was presaged by a giant elk¹¹, which “detached” itself from the darkness as if “from a place of omens”, and wheeled, like the horned god, Cernunnos, “right above” the bonnet of their car. And it was presaged, too, by the almost ritual “racket of clatter-pans” and the yelling of “Bears! Bears!”.

The unreality and the paper-thin flimsiness of human control over the wild energies are everywhere in Ted’s poem. He saw the ancient wilderness of Yellowstone as a place where bears were part of the “all-American family”, and eagles were “laid on” for dramatic effect, and “board cut-out bears” were dressed in overalls, and “coy nicknames” prettified the magma bubbling from the earth. “Through” that seemingly tamed surface, bubbled signs that “Prehistory was still at boiling-point”, but, nothing “translated” into reality¹². Only in his memory is there a glimpse of the vast depth of the canyon, screened (as if he was not then strong enough to face a clear view of reality) by the “spread fingers” of a great eagle’s wings, and still that memory can make him dizzy.

Sylvia was more intuitive. She responded instinctively to the dangers and was nervous and edgy. But both felt naively secure in their tent, where Ted slept with his “pitifully unimaginative” hatchet under his pillow. And it was in their tent, in the darkness, whilst they were “chrysalis” in sleeping bags and closest to trusting nature (like an animal undergoing metamorphosis), that the bear came to them.

Ted’s bears, in other poems, are one with Nature. They are “creatures of light”¹³; the “gleam” of life in the “sleeping eye of the mountain”¹⁴; a “bulb in wet soil” which wakes with the whole world to unwrap like “an enormous bulging mystery package”¹⁵. But, to Ted, the bear is also “the ferryman / to dead land”¹⁶, a creature which has got “everything for nothing” but whose “price is everything”¹⁷. So, like the Devil on this Path of A’Ain, the bear is ‘Lord of the gates of Matter’ – an all-powerful, a-moral, capricious life-force. Any attempt to “make a fiction” of its energies, whether by confining them to a National Park and making them seem like cuddly characters, or by turning them into a poem or story, is, inevitably, a “dud scenario” – something with all the life-blood squeezed out of it. And the danger in every confrontation with the life-energies is such that “a curious impulse”, a “slight flicker”, can tip that see-saw balance from unreal to real, from life to death¹⁸.

Ted saw this “well enough” in Yellowstone. But he did not see the same danger in Sylvia’s see-saw energies: did not see the instinctive and impulsive “self-salvation” which not only drove her to write, but drove her also to sacrifice others, especially those closest to her, by creatively distorting the truth and turning their lives into fiction. So, not only were all her experiences squeezed to provide material for her writing; and not only was the life-blood squeezed from her bear story; but there is also a suggestion, made

clearer in the last six lines of Ted's poem, that Sylvia instinctively avoided the premonition and fear of death, which was "hurtling too and fro" inside her own head, by sacrificing others in her work. Such sacrificial offerings included the husband in her bear story, her mother in *The Bell Jar*, and her father and Ted in her poems. In this way, Ted suggests that she found "somewhere" fictional where death "temporarily" (this word carries great foreboding) could "be rested".

In the end, however, the methods by which both Ted and Sylvia were trying, at that time, to come to grips with the deepest, darkest, natural energies and use them in their work, were also a dud scenario.

In 'Dream Life' (BL 142), the poem on the Path of A'Ain in the lower World of Yetzirah, the dud scenario of Ted's and Sylvia's shared poetic rebirth has also faltered, but the element of sacrifice is still strongly present. Sylvia's Visionary eye is now open and she has direct and frightening access to her unconscious energies. In 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', Ted wrote that "her inner crystal ball was helplessly truthful" (WP 184); and she was also acutely aware of the horrors and the madness which had resulted from the unrestrained power of primal energies in the world in general. The "blood-sticky" results of these began to materialize in images of war, mutilation and torture in her poems, and Ted saw them as a terrifying part of Sylvia's dream life.

Bloody images pervade 'Dream Life' and are summed up in the final line as "preparation" for a "Feast of Atonement". This is a summing-up which suggests many things. The Feast of Atonement (or the Fast of Atonement) is the most important day of the Hebrew year. It is a day of fasting and purification: a day of affliction of the soul in preparation for the Lord's forgiveness and for new beginnings. It is the only day on which the High Priest may approach the Lord's Seat of Mercy, and there, in a cloud of protective incense, he ritually sprinkles the Seat of Mercy with blood from the sacrificial sin offerings which he has made for himself and for his people. He does this so that they all may be reconciled to the Lord and brought into unity, or atonement (at-one-ment), with Him.

But the Feast of Atonement, and the ritual blood-sacrifices of bullock and goat, and the banishment of a scapegoat into the desert (all of which are prescribed in the Bible in Leviticus 16), also have pagan origins. And it is these which are most strongly felt in Ted's poem. His evocation of a "temple-crypt" where the priestess lolls unconscious over the crevasse "inhaling the oracle", links Sylvia with the priestesses of the Oracle at Delphi, which to the Ancient Greeks was the omphalos – the navel through which our everyday world was joined to the Underworld. It was the place where Apollo, God of the Sun and of Poetry, Music and Prophecy, slew the Earth Goddess's serpent, Python. And in slaying this dragon-serpent, Apollo conquered the dark primal life-forces, usurped the Earth Goddess's power, and claimed her sanctuary as his own. Thus the Earth Goddess's "primal cave" at Delphi, the sacred place in which intoxicating fumes from the Underworld flowed through a fissure in the earth carrying her prophecies, became the temple of Apollo – a "public dome", bounded and controlled by Apollo's priests.

At Delphi, too, the bloody rites of Isis and Osiris were celebrated. And it was the place where Dionysus (Apollo's dark, half-brother) was ritually torn to pieces, dismembered and buried, before being resurrected and reborn as Iachos. So, rites of purification in preparation for rebirth and at-one-ment with the powers of light, harmony and order and with the powers of darkness, fecundity and chaos persisted at the Earth Goddess's sanctuary at Delphi long after she had been dethroned.

Appropriately, one more meditation for this Path of the Devil is 'The Secret of Generation is Death'. Sylvia's own rites, as described by Ted in 'Dream Life', were specifically directed towards reunion with her father. She had come to believe that only by confronting the demons which drove her could she achieve wholeness and rebirth. So, sleep for her seemed to Ted to become a descent into her father's grave – a "nightly service" at her father's sacred shrine, which she furnished with the blood and the horror of his "gangrenous" dismemberment. Her father's blue eyes – "Aryan" and "bright blue" in her poem 'Daddy' (SPCP 222 - 224) – drove her on, and he was the one she associated with all the horrors which she included in that poem and in other poems which she collected together in 1962 under the title 'Daddy'19.

Sylvia, like the Hebrew High Priest, and like the sibyl priestesses at Delphi, attended the shrine of the Father alone. "Each night" (the phrase occurs three times in Ted's poem), she visited her "private primal cave", but she did not share her secret rites, her journey, or her visions even with Ted. Each night he "hypnotized"²⁰ her, offering her hypnotic suggestions of "courage, understanding and calm", but it seemed to him that her Father's oracle "spoke only conclusions" and that her dream life made her aware only of destruction and death. So, in this poem, on this particular Path, it seems as if Sylvia was chained to the altar of a false god and that her view of the world was distorted by too intemperate and unbending an allegiance to him: that she was, in other words, the victim of the Illusion and Rigidity of Hod.

Yet, from Ted's discussion of Ariel in 'Sylvia Plath: Ariel' (WP 161 – 2), and his much more detailed discussion of the sources of Sylvia's work in 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals' (WP 177 - 190), it is apparent that Sylvia had no choice. Ted noted, in the first, her "instinctive" compulsion for making patterns, the "clairvoyant precision" of her words, and her chilling, eerie, "luminous vision of Paradise" as an "unalterably spot-lit vision of death". He noted, too, that she was "possessed" by her "genius for love". In the second article, Ted went more deeply into the compulsions which drove Sylvia to write and "the deep and inclusive inner crisis" (WP 179) which lay behind all her work. He commented on the "magnetic inner process" which "seemed to engross all her attention" (the word 'engross' is interesting here for its negative meaning of 'make gross'), and he noted, too, Sylvia's preoccupation with death and rebirth, the "silent horrors" which went on inside her, and the "lack of inner protection" which almost, at times, seemed to invalidate her.

In an interview with Drue Heinz in 1995²¹, Ted spoke again about the compulsive pattern which lay behind all Sylvia's work; a pattern which "would be projected from somewhere deep inside…having been totally unconscious to her". And he went on

to say: "You cannot overestimate her compulsion to write like that. She had to write these things – even against her best interests".

In 'Dream Life', Ted writes that Sylvia seemed afraid to remember her dreams and that she would wake saying "No dreams". But from all Ted said elsewhere, and from Sylvia's own journals and letters, it seems that her dream life was really a waking dream which consumed and drove her, even as she achieved a first 'rebirth' in her work²² and began (in Ted's words) to confront the "demythologized ghost of her father" and "The Other – the deathly woman at the heart of everything she now closed in on" (WP 187).

Sylvia did record a number of dreams in her journal. On 25 Feb. 1959, she wrote of a dream in which "men in costume" (like the "carnival beggars" in 'Dream Life') had their legs hacked off and "fell down like ninepins with their stumps and lower legs scattered". About a month later²³, she wrote of "dreams of deformity and death" and of "all my dreams of deformed and tortured people", and she linked these dreams with feelings of guilt. Again, on 14 November 1959, she described "troubled" dreams and commented: "Old shames and guilts".

So, it seems that Sylvia did sometimes think that she had committed sins for which she must make sacrifices. And, as if confirming this, Ted, in 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals' wrote: "If an image of hers had its source in a sleeping or waking 'dream' [his punctuation], it was inevitably the image of some meaning she had paid for or would pay for" (WP 184). Yet, many of the images Ted cites in 'Dream Life' are images of "the camera's war": of death camps and atrocities for which Sylvia could have no responsibility but which, nevertheless, haunted and depressed her and kept her sleepless²⁴.

These were the vision of the apocalypse about which Sylvia wrote in 'Context' (JPBD 92 - 3) in February 1962. These were the visions which began to fill her poems with emptiness, blood and death, and which eventually found concrete expression in poems like 'Little Fugue' (SPCP 187 - 9), 'Berck-Plage' (SPCP 196 - 201), 'Daddy' and 'Getting There' (SPCP 247 - 9).Saten picture

It would not be surprising if Sylvia was afraid to remember her dreams, if her vision of apocalypse filled them, too. But the bloody horrors of that vision – images so like those in many of the oldest church frescos of the Last Judgement, in which the Devil is depicted supervising the gruesome torment and torture of sinners – these were the images which filled her waking life as she wrote them into her work. So, her "day-waking" was, as Ted says in his poem, only "a harrowed safety". And the fear and panic which she described in her journals, which followed her "with its blood-sticky feet", and which drove her to write, came unbidden from some unknown source.

In her story 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams' (JPBD 17 - 33), Sylvia's narrator is employed, just as Sylvia was in Boston, as a secretary typing records in the psychiatric clinic of a large hospital. She is a "dream-connoisseur" who, like Sylvia, knows all about waking dreams and panic. "I figure the world is run by this one thing", this narrator says,

“Panic... – it’s the same Johnny Panic awake or asleep”. And she expresses very much the same thoughts as Sylvia, who, in her journal on 14 Oct. 1958, commented that her work at the clinic “objectifies my view of myself”, and noted “Fear: the main god”.

Hell picture

Sylvia’s narrator has her own dream which is her “one dream”, her “dream of dreams”. It is a vision of Hell and its stinking lake of dragons and darkness is thick with the dirt of the world. It is a “Lake of Nightmare. Bog of Madness” which parallels “the sea clogged with corpses” which Ted lists in ‘Dream Life’ amongst the few dreams which Sylvia did remember. And, like all the dreams which Sylvia’s narrator “unearths”, it came from Johnny Panic, “the great Dream Maker”, whose dreams control the waking lives of his devotees just as much as their sleep.

Sylvia’s story finishes with a religious rite which ends in atonement. Her narrator is caught copying hospital records, but the sin of which she is accused is of “making time with Johnny Panic again”. For this sin, she is subjected to electric shock treatment (as Sylvia had been) which will cure her of her dreams and “unseat Johnny Panic from his own throne”. “Masked priests” officiate, she is anointed, robed in virginal white, and laid out like a sacrifice on an altar-like cot, with a crown of wire on her head and the “wafer of forgetfulness” on her tongue. But at the very moment when the electric shock “shakes her like a leaf in the teeth of glory”, Johnny Panic, the god whose “Word charges and illuminates the universe”, appears in a blue blaze of lightnings to save her.

Johnny Panic, in this story was Sylvia’s “God of Sleep”. His blue tongued lightning was in him and all around him. His religion of Fear was anatomized in the horrors recorded in his Bible of Dreams. He was the one who appeared in response to electrodes in the temples of his devotees; and his hellish dreams seeped into their waking lives to harrow them.

Ted’s poem is like an anaglyph of Sylvia’s black story. In it, Sylvia is the acolyte-priestess of the God of Sleep: the one who hears his oracle of Fear and who dreams, waking and sleeping, his deathly dreams. The dreams of dragons, filth and sacrifice which he makes for her are visions of Hell. So, his kinship is close to “that old serpent called the Devil, Satan” who was “cast out into the earth” by Michael, the angelic Dragon-slayer, as described in the Revelation of St. John, a book of the Bible which is often referred to as ‘The Apocalypse’.

Here, then, is the Devil which has to be faced on this Path of the Cabbalistic Tree. Here is the dragon-serpent of dark energies which in Cabbala must be combined with the Goddess’s creative powers so that they become like the intertwined serpents on Mercury’s caduceus. Only when this balance is restored will enlightenment and wisdom be achieved. This is the necessary passage “through grim death...into the Love fire”, the “eternal quest which is eternal fear”²⁵, which Cabbalists believe the Soul must undergo.

Sylvia wrote in ‘Context’ (JPBD 92 - 3) that her poetry was about Love and that the real

issues which concerned her were not her vision of the apocalypse but “the hurt and wonder of loving” and creating, in all its forms. Balance was essential if she was to use the primal energies within her for shamanic, healing purposes but, try as she did in the poems she wrote between ‘The Stones’ and the appearance of the Ariel voice in ‘Elm’, that balance eluded her and portents of death and darkness kept creeping in. Still, the dark, subconscious, dangerous energies of Johnny Panic drove her on. His was the bloody Feast of Atonement she was driven to prepare: but, in the end, she was not strong enough to control him and she herself became a sacrificial victim.

In ‘The Prism’(BL 187), on the Path of A’Ain in the World of Assiah, Ted turns to a common Cabbalistic symbol to describe Sylvia’s Visionary eye. From the seventeenth century on, as Cabbalists learned more about the behaviour of light and lenses, the triangle by which they had always represented the extension of Divine energy into time and space (into our three-dimensional world) began to be shown in symbolic pictures as a crystal prism. So, the pure light from the eye of God was now seen passing through a prism to fill the chaos of darkness with the spectrum of colours which animates our world. In one of Kircher’s drawings in 1665, for example, telescopes, mirrors, and other optical instruments are shown directing God’s light into our world (and into the dark Platonic cave of the human body) with mathematical accuracy. The picture still includes mythological figures and astrological symbols, but above all is seen the brilliance of the Hebrew letters which represent God’s holy name.

Ted’s poem, too, mixes scientific and non-scientific imagery, and it embodies the life and death duality and the element of sacrifice which are always associated with this Path. But at its heart, is Ted’s belief in the power of memory and “magical animated imagination” (SGCB 32), such as was expressed by Plato, by Thomas Aquinas, and, especially, in the writings of Occult Neoplatonists like Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno, all of whose works he knew well.

For the earliest thinkers, light was the supreme manifestation of the Divine in nature. Platonists believed that it stirred a response in the human body by animating the divine spark wherein lay the faint memory-shadow of Divine Ideas. Bruno, in *Gli Eroi* *Furore*²⁶, described how the Divine light enters the body through the eyes and brings the fire of Divine Love to the heart, and he wrote of the essential balance between the eyes, the heart and the will. And Ficino wrote that when we regain this “memory of the true and divine beauty that the eyes perceive, we desire the former with a secret and unutterable ardour of the mind” ²⁷. So, physical and spiritual vision were linked with memory and with desire for reunion with the Divine.

Cabbalists, too, believe in the importance of memory. But as scientific and mathematical knowledge advanced, some began to believe that enlightenment was connected with knowledge rather than wisdom. They came to believe that knowledge alone might give them a true understanding of the world and, through this, access to god-like powers. And their quest became increasingly bound by rationality, rules, formulae and dogma.

True Cabbalists, however, have never underestimated the mystery of Divine power.

They value rational knowledge but believe that enlightenment can come only through understanding of the Divine spark within themselves. For them, crystals have a long history of magical powers, but mostly they are used as tools – aids to communication between the gods (often symbolised by the sun, the stars and the moon) and the buried Divine spark in the human unconscious. Symbolically, a crystal is the lens of the Visionary eye: a prism which, when used in the right way, can focus the inner light and guide the Cabbalistic journeyer in the quest for at-one-ment with the Source.

Sylvia's "sea-poured crystal", in Ted's poem, is just such a crystal. The sun which lit her inner vision was an "ocean sun", shaped by her earliest memories of the sea and of pure happiness. These were the earliest, purest memories she had and they fired the love in her heart which made her seek to regain that innocent "Paradise". "I sometime think", she wrote in 'Ocean 1212-W' (JPBD 117), "my vision of the sea is the clearest thing I own"; and she likened it, as Ted does in his poem, to the "lucky stones" she used to collect from the beach. She noted, too, how "in one wash of memory" the colours of that sea-vision would "deepen and gleam".

So, Sylvia used that lucky stone of memory to bring the sounds and the images of her vision into focus. This was her general working method, but her sea-vision, in particular, is vividly recorded in 'Ocean 1212-W', and also much later and in a very different way in 'Daddy'.

Nauset picture

Sylvia's earliest memories of the sea were of Winthrop (Mass.) where the homes of her parents and her grandparents were close to the sea²⁸. But the sea Sylvia said she loved most was that further south, off Nauset in Eastham (Mass.), where she and Ted had spent part of the summer of 1957 shortly after their arrival in America. She wrote: "Nauset is my favourite beach in the world" (SPLH 27 Aug. 1960), and she called it "my beloved Nauset" (SPLH 15 March 1957). And clearly, she associated it with the seas of her earliest memories and with her Father who, in 'Among the Bumblebees' (JPBD 259 - 266) is the God who swam with her, shared his strength with her and kept her safe, but finally "betrayed" her by dying. In 'Daddy', she wrote bitterly of his death but still linked him and her prayers to "recover" him with "the waters off beautiful Nauset" – the phrase which Ted borrows for the opening line of his poem. Her memory of Nauset, then, was her magical, Mercurial, 'Vision of Splendour': the vision which is the Spiritual Experience of Hod on this Path and which must be combined with the Fire and Love of Tiphereth.

Sylvia's first nine years were her "self's cradle" – the formative years which shaped her self image. But her memory of that time was also the driving force "behind" all her "efforts" to regain her "intact childhood" and, so, was the cradle of the self which she hoped would be reborn.

But Ted, too, had memories of carefree days at Nauset²⁹ and in his own Visionary eye, as he wrote in 'The Prism', he saw the seas and sky and sand as vividly as Sylvia once did. He saw vividly, too, Sylvia's remembered shape walking there, and this image

inspired his tender, loving description of her in the poem and brought back to him, too, all she had sought to achieve – all her efforts to regain her “Paradise”. So, he imagined her “roaming away north”, which is the direction of the Pole Star, the world-axis, the mythical and biblical Mountain of God, and place of the Moon Goddess, the Devil, the Spirit, and of death.

So, Sylvia’s “seer’s vision stone” “goes with” Ted as an integral part of his own visionary memory long after Sylvia is in her grave. Throughout Birthday Letters he looked into it, as he did in ‘The Prism’, to see again their shared journey and to be inspired by its energies. And so, the phrase “I see you” recurs again and again in these poems, along with visionary images in photographs, mirrors, dreams and film.

In ‘The Prism’, Ted likens Sylvia’s Visionary eye to a “periscope lens”: something with which she could see above her earth-bound state³⁰. Only the best periscopes use prisms to bend the light (simple ones use mirrors) and Sylvia’s was a “flawless crystal” which channelled and bent the light of the heavens so that it entered her eyes and created the vivid images which inspired her. It was indeed a treasure which lit the fires of her heart (so-to-speak) with worship and love and, so, was “behind” that “eye-brightness” which, in Birthday Letters, has always connected Sylvia with the Goddess.

This prism, however, was both lucky and unlucky. And although Ted’s choice of the word “lucid” in his description of its balance suggests its translucence, its luminous quality, and its connection with clear, sane understanding, it also suggests (through the roots of the word: ‘Lux’) the tricky, unreliable nature of Lucifer / Pan / Mercury, which made that balance precarious. And, in the final six lines of the poem, Ted conveys that precarious balance well.

A prism, unlike a simple lens, bends light in just the way Ted describes. Viewed from one direction, the light of the source is transmitted in every detail: viewed from another, one sees only darkness. So, appropriately for this Path, one may see all or nothing. In Ted’s own Visionary eye, in his memory of the light which Sylvia transmitted directly from the Source, he sees every tiny detail down to the merest “flicker” of the flame which animated her “ecstasies”. Or, looking at his memories another way, he sees in his “crypt of dream” only the absolute darkness and extinguishment of death.

Ted’s choice of the word “flicker”, in these lines in ‘The Prism’, echoes the “slight flicker” which in ‘The 59th Bear’ not only drove Sylvia to turn life into fiction in her work but also turned the “beast” (as the bear is called there) into a killer. So, the capricious nature of the Beast who is Lord of the Gates of Matter on this Path, and the precarious balance which he holds over life and death, is emphasised again. Sylvia used all her courage, all her skill, every bit of the Goddess’s power that she could muster, to confront him, but ultimately his power over her was too great.

In the final line of ‘The Prism’, in the deepest darkness of the Devil’s Path in the World of Assiah, Ted, returns all that was Sylvia – body, spirit, soul, sea and air and fire, – to

the womb of earth and seals them, together with his darkest memories, beneath her gravestone slab.

ENDNOTE.

'A Pink Wool Knitted Dress' is one of three poems which Ted later inserted (as 14(b)) into the original list of 85 poems which he had sent to Christopher Reid (Poetry Editor at Faber & Faber) in 1997. '18 Rugby Street', inserted as 9(b) and 'Carlsbad Caverns' inserted as 37(b), were the other two. Obviously, these insertions changed the position of other poems relative to the Paths on the four Cabbalistic Trees, but so close are the links between each poem and the Path which it now occupies in the published sequence it is hard to believe that the inserted poems (or some suitable alternative poem, as in the case of the substitution of 'The Inscription' for 'The Laburnam') were not part of Ted's original, poetic, Cabbalistic journey. A personal journey and a published sequence of poems are two very different things and serve two quite different purposes.

Certainly, Ted had written more than 88 poems from which to make his choice for the published sequence. In 1995, discussing his current work with me, Ted told me that he had been writing "about 100 poems about things [he] should have dealt with thirty years ago. Should have written then, but couldn't". This, he said, had been a very personal journey made over many months (a few poems had been written years before). In 1998 he wrote to Keith Sagar that he had not thought of the poems as "parts of a whole", and had been "intrigued" when he brought them all together by "the maze of interconnections" between them (Hughes / Sagar Correspondence. BL Dep 10003(9) 22 June 1998). And this is exactly what one would expect of a Cabbalistic journey made poem by poem, Path by Path, over a considerable period of time, with no planned overview and with no goal other than understanding, enlightenment and healing.

In 1995, Ted had selected a few of poems which eventually appeared in Birthday Letters to be published for the first time in his New Selected Poems 1957 - 1994, but even in October 1997 he was still undecided whether to publish more of them or not. Only in November that year, long after the poetic journey which they represented had been completed, did he finally decide to go ahead and, writing to Keith Sagar on 17 November 1997, he said he had written 80 - 100 poems and that the forthcoming publication would contain "88 pieces". Birthday Letters appeared in January 1998. Howls and Whispers, published as a limited edition of 110 copies, also in 1998, contained eleven poems which were not included in Birthday Letters but which were, as Carol Hughes has noted (Letter 6.IV.03) "part of the whole".

So it seems, from Ted's handwritten amendments to the original typewritten, numbered list of poems which he sent to Christopher Reid, that he belatedly decided to restore the Cabbalistic pattern to the published sequence. It seems also, from a list of twenty-two numbers which Ted wrote, then scribbled out, on one copy of this document that he may also have been considering a more limited selection of these poems for a separate publication.

One final comment should be made about Ted's responses to translators and scholars who wrote to him with questions about Birthday Letters. His answers generally provide specific information about the factual details of individual poems, but he was always evasive about his method of putting the sequence together. In a letter to Keith Sagar, written by Ted on 22 June 1998, Ted answered a question from Sagar by saying that he could not now remember how he came to "shuffle" the Birthday Letters poems "into that order". He continued: "chronology of subject matter was the only rule – I think". That final, vague, addition of 'I think', suggests to me that this is exactly the sort of practical, general answer any Cabbalist or Magician would give to a general question: not because they wish to conceal their real intent, but because an answer in terms of complex, occult knowledge would be inappropriate and might well be misunderstood. A specific and knowledgeable query about occult matters would, most likely, have prompted a quite different answer.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Only for convenience do we label these complementary powers 'male' and 'female'.
2. The suggestion that Baphomet was a god of wisdom comes from several different sources. Using the Atbash cypher, Dr Hugh Schonfield, a Hebrew scholar and a researcher of the Dead Sea Scrolls, translated 'Baphomet' as the Greek word 'Sophia' (wisdom). Idries Shah in *The Sufis* (Anchor, NY, 1971. pp. 254 - 5) discusses the name as a corruption of the Arabic word 'Abufihamat', which means 'Father of Understanding', 'the transmuted consciousness' and 'the complete man'. Others claim the name is made up of the Greek words 'Baph' and 'Metis', meaning 'Baptism of Wisdom'.
3. The Endnote to this chapter contains comments on Ted's insertion of three poems into the list of poems which he had originally sent to Faber and Faber in 1997. 'A Pink Wool Knitted Dress' was one of these poems.
4. During the Second World War, in 1941, the 'Utility Mark' was patented to identify clothes and furnishings which the British government endorsed as being of reliable, controlled quality at a reasonable price. The Utility Scheme lasted until 1953, and serviceable items marked with the distinctive Utility Mark survived for many years after that.
5. A copy of this picture can be found at the Uffizi's site on the Internet (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseus_Freeing_Andromeda). There are also interpretations of this myth by many other artists.
6. Since this was Ted's Parish Church at that time, the normal practice would have been for bans to be read at morning service on three consecutive Sundays, publicly announcing the wedding and naming the prospective bride and groom. If this is not possible, a Special License signed by the Head of the Church of England may be granted in exceptional circumstances. Presumably, time constraints related to Aurelia Plath's visit to England were accepted as a valid reason for issuing a Special License

for Ted's and Sylvia's wedding.

7. Sylvia explained to Warren all the reasons for this secret wedding and her plans for another, much bigger, wedding in Wellesley the following June (SPLH 18 June 1956).

8. Sylvia wrote of "the curate as a second witness" (SPLH 18 June 1956), so perhaps Ted was deliberately altering the facts in order to make this connection with death in the poem.

9. Chimney sweeps, because of their association with fire and soot, have long had a folklore association with fertility. In May Day celebrations, they were often dressed in ribbons and greenery to represent the Green Man. And Saint George, too, in many parts of Europe is associated with fire. Presumably because of his power over the fire-breathing dragon, he became the patron saint of firefighters, yet the dragon (which is also the Uroborus serpent) is an ancient symbol of fertility.

10. Myers, L. Crow Steered Bergs Appeared (p.88). Myers writes that whilst Ted and Sylvia were living in America Ted wrote a number of letters to him in which he discussed a variety of issues, ranging from "the characteristics of mind beyond the personal mind to the inner life". These letters, written between August 1957 and September 1959, are now amongst the Hughes manuscripts held in the Woodruff Library at Emory University in Atlanta.

11. In Sylvia's story, a stag, not an elk, appears in a silvery, moonlit radiance and flashes "white" in their headlights. They are "consoled" by the sound of its galloping hooves and almost immediately they see the lights of the camp centre, and arrive there "laughing" with relief "like giddy adolescents" (JPBD 101).

12. Ted had written to Lucas Myers of the way in which American Society "had the property of disabling your contact with the natural world", whilst "the real world...retreated, sterilized, under cellophane" (CSBA 90).

13. 'That Morning' R 72; NCP 265.

14. 'The Bear' W 41; NCP 64.

15. 'The Grizzly Bear' UNS 30.

16. 'The Bear' W 41.

17. 'The Grizzly Bear' UNS 30.

18. This "see-saw" balance sums up the strong element of duality and ambivalence which pervades this Path of the Devil, the numbers of which (Tarot 15 and Cabbala 16) magnify the energies of the Path of the Hierophant (Vau) by ten. Both Paths, too, hold the element of sacrifice which is always associated with the acceptance of Divine

energies.

19. 'Daddy' was one of Sylvia's original titles for the collection of poems which was eventually published in 1965 as Ariel ('Collecting Sylvia Plath' (WP 172)).

20. Ekbert Faas notes that Sylvia began to write a story called 'The Hypnotising Husband' some time in 1958, and Ted, in his interview with Faas in 1977, said that he often used to hypnotize Sylvia to sleep (UU 210).

21. The Paris Review, Vol. 37. No. 134. Spring 1995. pp. 55 - 94.

22. Ted identified 'The Stones' (SCPC 136 - 7) as the poem which marked this first 'birth' in late 1959. But this birth was not as complete as it seemed and much work had still to be done before the voice of Ariel became truly free (WP 186).

23. SPJ 29 March 1959.

24. Sylvia told her mother this in the letter she wrote on 7 Dec. 1961 (SPLH). There may well have been additional reasons for her depression at that time but her sensitivity to world affairs was always acute.

25. Jacob Böhme, Theosophische Wercke, Amsterdam, 1682. Trans. Thomson, and included in Robb, The Hermetic Museum, Taschen, 1997. p.245.

26. Bruno, De Gli Eroici Furore, Apresso Antonio Baio, Parigi, 1585. Part 2. Dialogues 2 - 7, Trans. Paulo Eugene Memmo Jr. 1964.
(<http://www.esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm>).

27. Marsilio Ficino, Part 2. Dialogues 2 - 7, Trans. LSES students, Shepherd-Walwyn, London, 1978. Letter 7: 'On Divine Frenzy'.

28. Sylvia's parents lived quite close to Boston Harbour; her grandparents (with whom she often stayed) lived nearer to the Atlantic Coast, at Point Shirley.

29. Ted included some of these memories in 'Flounders' (BL 65 - 66), which is one of the poems on the earlier Path of the Lovers. The "pre-Adamite" horse-shoe shell of 'The Prism' also appears in that poem but it is linked there with Venus-Aphrodite, rather than with the God who was her father.

30. The self-chosen, earthy shackles which bind Sylvia, just as the small figures on the Tarot card for this Path are loosely bound to the Devil's alter, are nicely suggested by the "earthenware earrings" she wears. Ear-rings which pierce the ears (as Sylvia's probably did not) have a long folk-lore and folk-medicine connection with good eye-sight.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional Tower cardPe path

The Path of The Tower – Pé

Tarot card 16. Tree Path 17.

Joining Sephiroth 8 (Hod) and 7 (Netzach).

'Your Paris', 'Grand Canyon', 'Perfect Light', 'The God'.

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Once the Visionary Eye is open, the Revelation of Truth becomes possible. Such a revelation is sudden, involuntary, shattering and transforming. The fortress of the individual self is destroyed and a new being with new understanding is born.

In Ted's discussion of 'Orghast', the experimental drama he and Peter Brook created in 1970 - 71, he described the way in which we all may experience moments of revelation through sound and music: how, sometimes, we are aware of some extraordinary, elemental quality which seems to connect us with "a spirit, a truth under all truths"¹. And he described such an experience as being at once utterly beautiful yet also harrowing and terrible.

If this is so for those who are uninitiated in any spiritual way, then it is most powerfully so for those who have sought enlightenment and have followed the rigorous paths towards self-knowledge. For them, as the testaments of religion, mythology, Cabbala, Alchemy and other mystical teachings disclose, Divine revelation results in conversion, transmutation, metamorphosis: the transformation from a worldly being to one filled with other-worldly, spiritual energies².

The image of the lightning-struck tower which is shown on the Traditional Tarot card for this Path of the Tower (the Path of Pé = 'mouth') is an apt symbol for Divine revelation. Appropriately, lightning does not just strike the tower, it flows between the heavens and the interior of the tower, thus connecting the Source with the Divine Spark within the material, earth-bound body. The crown of the tower, like the crown we humans metaphorically award ourselves for our rational abilities, is toppled to one side by this supremely non-rational (yet natural) event. And two human bodies fall to earth amidst a shower of golden spheres, which, in some Tarot packs, are shaped like the Hebrew letter 'Yod' to represent the Spirit of God. So, symbolically, at the moment when the

lightning bolt of Truth joins the energy of the Divine Source and the Divine Spark within the initiate, human consciousness is freed from all material illusion and all bondage, the individual ego is cast down, and division is overcome. If the initiate's care and preparation thus far have been adequate, a new, whole, naked and vulnerable spirit is born, phoenix-like, from the fires.

Anthanor picture

Fire is the Mother element associated with this Path. And, the fact that the tower on the Traditional Tarot card looks very like the Alchemical athanor or furnace, as it is depicted in many Alchemical manuscripts, is a further reminder that there are both generative and latent fires within the initiate on this Path³, and both are essential to the end result. The Alchemist knows that on both the practical (chemical) level and the spiritual level only carefully prepared, pure materials should be put into the vessel which is placed in the athanor. He or she also knows that the chemical reaction within that vessel, once begun, may be violent and explosive. So, continuous patient and precise attention is critical to the success or failure of the whole quest⁴. And the image of the lightning struck tower is not only a metaphorical representation of the final ejaculation of the pure spiritual gold of the soul from imprisonment in the base matter of the body, it is also a graphic warning of the sort of disaster which will result from even the smallest degree of carelessness or imprecision in the Great Work.

Clearly, too, there is phallic symbolism in this Tarot card imagery. This is related to the double meaning of the word 'ejaculation', which refers both to the sudden release of generative sperm in a sexual climax; and to a sudden involuntary cry, for which the mouth (which is the Hebrew name for this Path) is essential. The Cabbalistic interpretation of the word Pé, however, encompasses both the Divine mouth from which comes the Word, the breath of life, Truth and Grace but also destruction and death; and the human mouth through which the one enlightened by Divine revelation may transmit Truth, wisdom and words of blessing to others.

At each end of the Path of Pé, which links the Pillar of Form to the Pillar of Force, are the Sephiroth Hod (8) and Netzach (7): Splendour and Endurance; Logic and Feeling. The Virtues of these two are, respectively, Honesty and Truthfulness; their Qlippoth are Rigidity and Habit. Their energies complement each other and both are linked by separate Paths to Tiphereth (6) at the heart of the Tree, making a triangle which reflects the Divine Triangle at the top of the Tree. Numerologically, the powers of the Sephiroth 6, 7 and 8 are greatly magnified on this Path, which in Tarot is numbered 16 (the powers of 6 added to the powers of 10; also, $1 + 6$ reduces to 7); and in Cabbala is numbered 17 (the powers of 7 added to those of 10; also $1 + 7$ reduces to 8). An additional Cabbalistic number for this Path is 80: 8 multiplied by the powers of 10.

This reverberation and magnification of the powers of 7 (the number of Venus, Goddess of Love), 8 (the number of Mercury – Lucifer, psychopomp or light-bringer) and 6 (the number of The Way) makes the achievement of balance on this Path especially difficult. Metaphorically, the initiate has the support of these two most powerful gods but both have a double nature and both can be jealous, vengeful and tricky. In addition, the

astrological sign which governs this Path is that of Mars, God of War, whose energies are turbulent and dangerous, but who may also provide the initiate with the courage and determination which are necessary here. Success or failure is sudden and dramatic; and failure may result in the imprisonment and enslavement of the initiate⁵, and in sacrifice and death. In these circumstances, the balancing energies of Tiphereth – The Way (6) – magnified as they are on this Path, are essential if the initiate is to succeed.

War is an important sub-text in 'Your Paris' (BL 36 - 38), which is the poem on this Path of the Tower in the Atziluthic World: but the archetypal pattern which shapes this poem is Alchemical.

Briefly: for the spiritual Alchemist, there are two essential and basic generative forces in the body and these are known as 'Sulphur' and 'Quicksilver'. Sulphur is regarded as male: it is heavy and coagulating, hot and dry, and it contains the inner, fixed gold of the Soul. Quicksilver/ (Mercury) is regarded as female; it is mobile, volatile, sometimes corrosive, and it contains the Vital Spirit, the 'germ' of the Sun. The coalescing and cleansing powers of both Sulphur and Quicksilver are necessary for the progressive purification of the 'Base Matter' of the body and for the ultimate revelation and release of the pure gold Spirit/Soul.

Ted, in 'Your Paris' is Sulphur: Sylvia is Quicksilver. His vision of Paris in June 1956 was still contaminated with wartime horrors; hers, he imagined, was formed by American writers like Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Miller and Stein, and by artists' representations of the city. He was dog-like, nose-to-earth, "pondering", ponderous, solid: she, an airy, mercurial glitter of exclamations and cries. And he heard the "contrabasso counterpoint" beneath her "ecstasies". Neither was yet able to see the truth beneath their illusory interpretation of the world.

Legally bound together as husband and wife, the couple had now, as in an Alchemical reaction, to work together to produce a balanced, stable, harmonious and productive union. As two young people with very different temperaments and from very different worlds they began their new partnership in (appropriately) the "Hotel des Deux Continents" in Paris. And the individual and vastly different ways in which they saw Paris is like that first, impure, mixture of Sulphur and Quicksilver which the Alchemist measures carefully into an hermetically sealed flask and places in the fires of the athanor.

Just as the Alchemist may need to repeat this process many times before the Alchemical goal is achieved, Ted and Sylvia still had much to learn. In this Atziluthic World, Ted shows them as unskilled in understanding and facing reality. They are deflected from reality (and deflect reality) by camouflage and self-deception, so that they make false appraisals and false interpretations of the world and of each other. Sylvia hides her fears and protects herself with verbal anaesthetic. Ted is dog-like, his wolf-energies lulled by love into a desire to "humour" Sylvia, but also blocked and "scorched-up" by the barrage of words, "exclamations", "cries", and "ecstasies" by means of which she prevents herself from examining her innermost feelings. And it is

interesting to note that just as in Alchemy, where the purest Sulphur and the purest Quicksilver each retain a germ of the other within themselves, Ted's Sulphurous vision of Paris was coloured by his quicksilver imagination – by carefully “rehearsed” scenes based on what he had heard and read of its war-time history; and Sylvia's Quicksilver vision of the Paris was something she wanted to draw – to coagulate and fix, just as Sulphur coagulates and fixes.

Ted's imaginative vision of Paris, however, was Sulphurous in its expression. For him, Paris was a bullet-scarred place of “nightmare” in which, with a dog's reputed psychic sense (another Quicksilver/Mercurial characteristic) he became a “ghost-watcher”, one who smelled the methane “stink” of fear and of old graves, and who tasted the dregs of terrible secrets beneath the surface civilities. He saw only the Sulphurous underside of things, and even a sunny pavement was darkened for him by what he “read” as bullet scars in the wall above it. His “perspectives”, he notes in the poem, were so “veiled” by fumes from the pit that he was “not much ravished” by his view of the roofs.

Sylvia's quicksilver vision of these same roofs, however, was that of “les toits” – something from a light-filled impressionist painting. War, to her, seemed to be nothing more than an “aesthetic touch” to that painting: something like the allegedly “proleptic” mark on a Picasso portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire⁶. She called Ted “Aristide Bruant”, after the romantically debonair figure in a famous poster by Toulouse Lautrec (and there is a germ of Sulphur here, too, because Bruant, who was a cabaret artist, was famous for his corrosive wit, his excessive drinking, and for degrading and insulting his audience). And it seemed to Ted, then, that everything Sylvia saw was given added texture and colour by her words, her “immaculate palette” of cries, a “lingo” peculiar to her. What Ted did not see at that time – what all that quicksilver camouflage actually prevented him from seeing - was the real corrosive terror, pain and uncertainty in Sylvia herself: a torture which both burned and “sealed”, flayed and congealed (just as a chemical mixture of mercury and sulphur would do if it were inside her), so that her spirit “hung waiting” in agony in the “underground” chamber of her body.

Only years later, when Ted read Sylvia's journals, did he learn that three months before their honeymoon trip to Paris, Sylvia had written a passionate and agonized letter to Richard Sassoon after his rejection of her. In her journal, she described her physical and mental distress in terms of “internal bleeding”: “day by day”, she wrote, “it drips, and gathers, and congeals” (SPJ 6 March 1956). Later that same month, she had gone to Paris expecting to meet Richard, only to find that he had gone away. Her letters to him lay unopened on his desk.

Sylvia, surely, must have walked Paris with Ted with all these recent events fresh and painful in her memory. She must have known that at any time, around any corner, they might come face-to-face with Sassoon and a “final revelation” of her secret might occur. But she masked all this with the “gushy burlings” which she “excused” with “practised lips”. So, Ted “yawned and dozed” and watched the way in which she transformed real things, including living things like himself, into fixed and manageable images on paper. Significantly, he describes her doing this “as by touch”, as if she were blind and did not

physically see these things. And, indeed, like the writing of poems and stories⁷, drawing was Sylvia's instinctive way of trying to calm the fears which drove her: she found it "anaesthetic", but it was not yet a true way of seeing, understanding and controlling the energies of her world.

Another poem, 'Paris 1954', which begins the sequence of Howls and Whispers, is set two years earlier than 'Your Paris' but it also deals with the sort of cataclysmic and life-changing event which is associated with the Path of the Tower. The focus in 'Paris 1954', however, is on a "young man" who will unwittingly be sacrificed to some terrifying, powerful and soul-destroying energy. This horror has lain in wait for him and comes to him, in the poem, "in the likeness of a girl". Yet, because it presents only the male perspective, this poem lacks the balance of 'Your Paris'. There is no sense of the girl's own unwitting role in the drama or of her own pain and sacrifice: she enters the poem only as the vehicle for this horror – this "scream". So, in effect, 'Paris 1954' is like a solitary howl of pain and it does not fit the established pattern of the shared journey which is an essential part of Birthday Letters. 'Your Paris', on the other hand, with its careful mixture of untempered, unpurified male and female elements, is much better suited to this particular Atziluthic Path in the Birthday Letters sequence.

Whilst the underlying pattern in 'Your Paris' is strongly alchemical, 'Grand Canyon' (BL 96 - 08), which is the poem on this Path in the Briatic World, is shaped by Ted's own synthesis of Cabbalistic beliefs and cosmic creation myths. On this Path where Truth is revealed by sudden Divine intervention, the fine interface between human and Divine, illusion and Truth, past and present, life and death, is suggested throughout the poem by fragile, protective membranes. A meniscus tops a "brimming glass" of orange juice; uterine membranes surround the six-week-old fetus; "eardrums" are subjected to unlikely "stagey tales", but respond, too, to genuine reverberations of canyon thunder; a water-bag protects cool water from desert heat; and "body-sacks" are assailed by physical and mental "shock-waves". Most important of all, is the drum-skin membrane from which came "PAUM!", a sound which "swallowed" "everything" and which echoed down the years to recur "at odd moments" – still as vivid, as "shaking", and as close, as the voice of the daughter whose living presence linked that first drumbeat with the moment when Ted wrote its sound into this poem.

Grand Canyon, as a geographical location and as a poem, brings together all the Mother elements (Fire, Air, Earth and Water) in a place and a poem which join past to present. The canyon itself is an elemental place shaken with "thunder and lightning", a place of myth and story; a place so vast that normal perception is disturbed and the senses reel. And in Ted's poem, it is "America's Delphi", a chasm close to the hellish fires of the underworld, and the place of "America's big red mamma" from whose body everything around was created and who, like the Earth Goddess, might provide Sylvia with "a sign" or a prophecy.

Birth, in particular, is a Mystery which is threaded throughout this poem. Sylvia is preparing to give birth. She was six weeks pregnant with Frieda when she and Ted visited Grand Canyon, and she was also pregnant with the words which soon, at Yaddo,

she would shape into a creative rebirth in 'Poem for a Birthday'. At the beginning of 'Grand Canyon', Ted shows her balanced precariously on the rim of the Goddess's realm. Her orange juice and her foetus both contain an essence of life, both push against a thin membrane, and both are carried by Sylvia with protective care. Even the suspended water-bag repeats this image of a carefully carried membranous container full of the essence of life. And the way in which Ted has used the personal pronouns 'her' and 'you' in relation to "foetus", "quaking echo-chamber" and "daughter", merges together the identity of all the women – the Goddess, Sylvia and the child.

Ted's image of the "mamma" canyon lying open to the caress of the sun is sensual and erotic, but the "afterglow of her sensations" is also linked in these lines to a birth. This particular birth, however, was not easy: "something", it seems, as in the myth of God's creation of Adam from Earth's red clay, had been "hacked" from her as if from a "quarry", but (as in the myth, where Adam has still to be animated by God's breath) whatever was born was stone-like – a "sculpture". It is hard not to remember, here, Sylvia's own creative agonies at that time, and that she described the stories she was producing as "pretty artificial statues" (SPJ 16 Sept. 1959) and, even after 'Poem for a Birthday', called her poems lifeless - 'stillborn' (SPCP 142).

Even the cougar hunter, in Ted's poem, carries the essence of life. His performance may have been "stagey" and joke-less but his words still held the faint vibrations of untamed, elemental energies, and these "rippled" over the foetus which (because of Ted's use of 'her') may be Frieda and/or the gestating spark of the Goddess within Sylvia herself. The cougar hunter's "translation" of these primitive energies into a dollar-making show, however, was not what Ted and Sylvia had come for.

What they did come for (and Ted describes their journey in terms of the mental and physical "labour" which they have endured and calls it a "pilgrimage") was a "sign", a "word", a "blessing". And the drum-beat which brought them this takes us immediately back to Delphi and the Mysteries associated with the rebirth of Dionysus as Iacchos. During the celebration of these Mysteries, the sound of the tympanon (a drum-like instrument "with a voice like thunder") was known to all initiates to announce the moment of Epopteia – the moment when ineffable things were revealed⁸. It announced the birth of the Divine Child, the appearance of the god or goddess, and the renewal of life. It was a moment of thunder and lightning (or enlightening) which brought together Heaven, Earth and the Underworld.

Lightning in most mythologies comes from the Sky-Gods: thunder from the Underworld. In 'Grand Canyon', heaven, earth and the underworld come together in "miles-high ramparts" and canyon depths; "sky-vistas"; and a dark road starred with "beer-can constellations" from which "thunder-beings" sweep "against" and "through" the travellers. Yet the drumbeat "PAUM!", which reverberates through the last part of the poem, is far more powerful than all the rumblings and reverberations, ripples and "shock-waves", which have disturbed the various membranous interfaces in the poem so far. To Ted, it was the summoning voice of the canyon-Goddess. But the letters by which he actually "made a note" of this sound⁹, and the way in which the poem brings

together all the cosmic energies and the Mother elements, suggest other creation mysteries beside those of Delphi and Eleusis.

Nataraja picture

Ted's word, 'PAUM', embodies 'Aum' or 'Om', which, for Hindus, is a sacred word. In Hindu mythology, it is the sound of the Lord Shiva's drumbeat: a sound which signals the dance, Tandava, by which one cosmic period of the world disappears, is absorbed into the Absolute, and another begins. In the form of Nataraja, Lord of the Dance, and surrounded by cosmic fire, Lord Shiva destroys and creates the world. He is Lord of Demons and Teacher of Truth. His dance is ecstatic, so he was confused by the Ancient Greeks with Dionysus. And he is ithyphallic, represented everywhere in the Hindu world by the Lingam. All of which attributes make him an appropriate figure here on the Path of the Tower¹⁰.

Aum, too, is 'Pranava', the 'unstruck sound which accompanies the vibration of every atom and particle in the universe. It is the manifest sound of the Supreme Being whose breath destroys and creates the cosmic vital force and keeps it in motion (and, so, is synonymous with the "Word" of the Christian Scriptures). And it is the bridge between the infinite and the finite. In Hindu belief, as in Cabbalistic and NeoPlatonic belief, the world is patterned by cosmic vibration and the Divine Spark (or Atman) is the True Self within us which is released from the material illusory world by the Divine revelation of Truth. 'Aum' brings the human into harmony with the Divine. It encompasses all levels of consciousness (waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep) and all states of being (rational, imaginary, conscious, unconscious, ecstatic and blissful). Aum (or Om) has resonance in many religions and in many languages. It is part of 'Amen' and of the Buddhist 'Hum', and it is the root-syllable of words like 'omnipotent', 'omnipresent', 'omniscient' and, appropriately here, 'omphalos'.

PAUM! incorporates AUM into the drumbeat of Ted's poem, and with its repetition he creates a mantra containing the most powerful syllable and sound associated with the Absolute - the All. No wonder, then, that it "swallowed" everything, destroyed "memory", wiped out time and "suspended" everything and everyone (again, 'her' in lines 62 and 63 encompasses the Goddess and the unborn child) in its vibrations.

Symbolically, whilst this was happening, the water-bag, which they had carried with them un"broached" on their pilgrimage as a precautionary life-support measure, was stolen. No such material support is possible in the world of the spirit. Truth strips away all such illusions and leaves the soul naked and vulnerable. "Nothing is left".

Nothing was left, either, of the world Ted tried to recreate as he wrote the poem. Sylvia was dead. And although he does not name her, he links her again, in a single ambivalent 'you', with the mamma-Canyon to which he "never went back", so that it seems that both "are dead". Only the powerful vibration of that drum-sound returned at "odd" times, unannounced, to dissolve time and to re-awaken him to the imminence of Truth. This was the revelation which Ted and Sylvia once shared: that Truth exists "close", "itself" and Absolute, like the vibrations of a voice.

Once again, in the penultimate line of the poem, Ted linked the personal pronoun 'your' with 'daughter' in such a way that Goddess, mother and child are merged, and other interpretations of this lines are made possible. Frieda was Sylvia's daughter and also Ted's, so he could describe the sound of her voice as "ours". But everything created belongs to the Mother Goddess: Frieda, Sylvia, and Sylvia's poems, all are hers; and throughout Birthday Letters Sylvia has represented the Goddess, as a daughter would. So, "ours" may be understood as a queenly claim by the Goddess to Sylvia, to her poems, and also to the distinctive voice that is heard in Sylvia's poems. All of these possibilities are joined by a dash to that final PAUM! which ends the poem, and dissolves everything - people, places, time, and everything in and about the poem – in its vibrations¹¹.

On the fourth of May, 1962, Sylvia wrote to her mother enclosing colour photographs of herself, Frieda and Nicholas which were taken amongst the daffodils in their Court Green garden. One of these photographs (SPJ opp. p. 517) exactly fits Ted's description of the "picture" in 'Perfect Light' (BL 143), which is the poem on this Path in the World of Yetzira. Even in a black-and-white reproduction, the picture glows with light: in colour, the golden glow of the daffodils and sunlight must have made it even more remarkable.

Sylvia wrote that the photographs were taken on Easter Sunday, a day with the most ancient connections with the Spring equinox and the Mysteries of rebirth and renewal. Easter is said to be named after the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring, Eostre; but 'Eos' was also the Ancient Greek Goddess of Dawn. For the Greeks, too, the Spring equinox was associated with the myth of Persephone's return from the Underworld. And in the Mystery cults at Delphi and Eleusis it was the time of the birth (or rebirth) of the Divine Child, as it also was in the cults of Attis, Osiris and Orpheus.

Horus picture

Ted's image of Sylvia in his poem combines all these ancient associations. She, like Eos, glows with the "perfect" golden light of a new dawn. She is "like a daffodil", the flower which, like Persephone, returns from the dark Underworld of the earth and heralds the onset of Spring¹². And, in her arms, is her "new son". The "innocence" of Mother (Ted placed this word carefully so that it has a capital letter) and child, and the iconic grouping – "as in the Holy picture" – is an archetypal image which has existed for thousands of years¹³.

Madonna picture

Complex as such a variety of mythological association may seem, all are relevant to the combination of rebirth and the sudden revelation of Truth which is associated with the Path of Pé. And Ted's poetic "picture" of Sylvia and her children seated on the newly blossoming earth, bathed in pure sunlight, and radiant with love not only reflects all these associations but also is a beautiful expression of the illumination which is part of the Glory of Hod on this Path.

Caught in the instantaneous click of a camera shutter, this moment of illumination is suspended in time. Neither ancient “knowledge” from the “hill fort” on which Sylvia sits, nor the weighty import of her “next moment” reach this picture. In it, Sylvia is child-like again. It is her “April”, her Spring, and everything has “melted” in this Easter dawning of “perfect light” – a light which, in Cabbala and Alchemy, marks the sudden appearance of the pure Mercurial Spirit, the herald of the final stages of the journey¹⁴. In Alchemy, this Spirit is called ‘the golden flower’¹⁵; it is the mystical ‘transforming substance’; and the light which accompanies its appearance is called the ‘aurora’ (the dawn) or, as in the title of one of the oldest texts, the ‘Aurora consurgens’ (the Dawn of Wisdom, which is the Wisdom of God)¹⁶.

Another common Cabbalistic image also makes sense of Ted’s reference to “ the knowledge” which failed to reach the picture from inside the moated hill-fort. There is a pre-historic hill-fort in the garden at Court Green where those April photographs were taken, but in Ted’s poem it is not the fort which fails to reach the photograph, but the knowledge “Inside” (the capital letter is significant) it which fails to reach the picture. Ted’s choice of words in these Birthday Letters poems was never careless, so we can assume that he chose the word ‘picture’ deliberately, thus extending the meaning of his words beyond a reference to a specific photograph. Whatever actually lies inside that hill-fort at Court Green (other than the earth itself) can only be remains on which archaeological knowledge might be based. It makes no sense to suggest that such knowledge could ever have been part of the photograph. On the other hand, Cabbalistic and Alchemical knowledge is frequently represented as a fortress (or a moated hill), around which the Truth-seeker must journey. What is inside that fort is Cabbalistic knowledge, knowledge of The Way; and ‘Our Mercury’, too, is there, for knowledge alone will not bring Wisdom: Mercury is the mediator, the ‘transforming substance’, the channel for the lightning flash which will join the Divine Source to the Divine Spirit, destroy the tower of illusion, and reveal the Truth.

So, if we look at the bigger picture, one which includes Sylvia’s quest for her true Self, and one which takes into account the position of this poem on the Cabbalistic Path of the Tower, the moment of pure illumination and love which Ted describes in his poem is indeed a moment which no amount of knowledge could provide. It is a moment which reveals the supreme, harmonising power of love; a moment in which the energies of Mercury and Venus on this Path are totally balanced; a moment of perfect light illuminating The Way.

It must be remembered, too, that in this bigger picture, Sylvia’s quest was undertaken through her writing; and this particular Path, in the World of Yetzirah, is where the patterns formed so far (both rational and non-rational) are crystallized. If the word ‘moment’ is taken to embody movement, weight and importance, Sylvia’s “next moment”, in her poetry was the moment in which her Ariel voice suddenly emerged in ‘Elm’. Sylvia had spent the early weeks of April 1962 writing ‘Elm’: and the “picture” of Ted’s poem is set in April¹⁷. That sudden emergence of Ariel (a pure Mercurial Spirit in every respect, and herald of Sylvia’s poetic rebirth) was a result of Sylvia’s long inner battle from which she, like a weary “infantryman”, had carried the heavy load of her

wounded Self: and her “no-man’s -land” was “the strange limbo of ‘gestation / regeneration’” about which Ted wrote in ‘Sylvia Plath and her Journals’ (WP 180). Nothing of all this reached that picture of perfect light in Ted’s poem: all was “melted” in that flash of illumination.

Illumination, whenever it occurs, is sudden (like a lightning flash), momentary and transforming, but it does not ensure the successful completion of the quest. Often, as in the Yetziritic World in which this poem occurs, there are still many Paths yet to be completed; new revelations may still be necessary; and infinite care and attention must be constantly maintained.

Sadly, in both the literal sense and in the metaphorical sense of Revelation which is appropriate to this stage of the Cabbalistic journey, this was Sylvia’s “only April on earth” amongst her daffodils. Her moment of perfect light was a moment of revelation and it did herald a rebirth, but this was not the end of her quest, and her death in February 1963 prevented its completion. Yet, by omitting any punctuation at the end of line 5 of his poem, Ted linked Sylvia’s ephemeral moment “on earth” amongst her daffodils with that of “any one of those daffodils” and, thus, he put his “picture” into the context of the continuous, cosmic cycle of death and rebirth which dominates this Path, and by doing so he gave it universal meaning.

In ‘The God’ (BL 188-191), which is the poem on this Path in the World of Assiah, Sylvia’s internal battles fill the poem, but the no-man’s-land from which she brings her wounded Self is the desert (the “Sahara”) of the Cabbalistic Abyss. This Abyss, Daat, like the no-man’s-land of wars, is a place of shells: a dark place in which only the fragments of failed creations exist. It is also the desert place, outside the World of Light, to which Fallen Man was exiled and from which the human soul, the Divine Essence of Self, must be retrieved. On the Cabbalistic Tree, it separates the Divine triangle of Sephiroth 1, 2 and 3, from the rest of the Tree and the Cabbalistic pilgrim must cross this desert-Abyss at the start and at the end of the journey. Importantly, on the Path of Pé, the energies of its two Sephiroth (Hod and Netzach) are mediated and balanced by those of Tiphereth (6 – The Way) which, itself, is linked by the High Priestess’s Path (the Path of Gimel – the Camel) across the desert-Abyss to Sephira 1 at the apex of the Tree.

All these links, and the energies associated with them, are an essential part of the imagery Ted used in ‘The God’. At the same time, the poem is very much part of the World of Assiah (itself a World of Shells), where the Qlippoth of Sephiroth 7 (rigidity and false ideology) and 8 (habit, routine and the repetition of old patterns) are clearly demonstrated.

At this point in the chronology of Birthday Letters, Sylvia’s journey was over. And these last poems, as well as being part of Ted’s attempt to understand all that happened, are like laments for the great endeavour in which he and Sylvia had invested so much but which had failed. At the heart of ‘The God’ is another Holy picture but now it is not that of Mother and infant, but a pièta – a mother grieving for her dead child. And this image

conveys the grief of both Sylvia and Ted at the loss of Sylvia's newborn Self.

Yet Ted's love, as well as his grief, shine through the rhythms of 'The God', uniting the disparate thoughts and emotions, and balancing the fiery Mercurial images and energies which drive it. And love, in a different way, is shown to underlie all of Sylvia's struggle for rebirth.

From the beginning, "like a religious fanatic", Sylvia had looked for something or someone to receive her love. She was "possessed", as Ted wrote elsewhere, by "a genius for love" which she "didn't quite know how to manage" (WP 162). Sylvia's father, clearly, had been the god on whom she had bestowed her love, but after his death she was "without a god", although she still wrote about him in god-like terms. In notes she wrote in her journal in December 1958, after sessions with her psychologist, she analysed and recorded her ideas about god; and about "Love"; and about her writing. All that she wrote then is pertinent to Ted's description of her in 'The God'.

In particular, Sylvia wrote that what she wanted in "Love" was something which "was inside a person": it was something "strong and loving in body and soul" which would make you "perfectly happy with them if you were naked on the Sahara" (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958). She was as rigid in her requirements for love as she was about her writing: she knew what she wanted, she said, and she did not compromise. And she compared her approach to that of others who went to extreme measures for the sake of love, and suggested that her own approach was harder, even, than that of an ascetic like St. Theresa of Avila, whose autobiography she was reading at that time (SPJ Appendix 10. 44 [a-b]). Writing, too, she described as "a religious act", and she was very clear about her desperate need to write and her fear of failure: but she was very unclear about what she wanted to write, listing numerous suggestions for topics, characters' names, fragmentary ideas and story-outlines.

"Wanted to write?", Ted asked in 'The God'. "What?", Why? What was it "within" that demanded that its tale be told? Sylvia did not know the answer: only that like all writers "The story that has to be told" was her God, even though He/it seemed to be "dead" or "non-existent". She was, indeed, in a desert of emptiness and torment, like a religious fanatic. And Johnny Panic, like an ascetics' idea of God, was her own creation, drawn from her "emptiness" just as "goblins" are sometimes "sucked" from the ascetics' sterility by the vacuum in which they choose to exist¹⁸.

To this God of Panic, Sylvia offered "verses" (a word which implies their emptiness and lack of value). Nevertheless, the tears of pure, instinctive emotion which she "dropped" into these verses became, "after dawn", a "crystalline spectrum": as if, in Cabbalistic terms, Sylvia's true heart-felt emotions remain, like "dried" desiccated "salt crystals" (the "sweat" of her labour in the desert Abyss) in the verses which eventually led to her rebirth. There they still are, like "oblations" and "little sacrifices" made to an unknown god.

But those little sacrifices, it seems, were not enough: even though the position of the

word “soon” joins them (after a break which suggests a period of time) to the sacrifice of the “dead child” at the heart of the next 10 lines of Ted’s poem, thereby suggesting their role as precursors to this terrible scene. Sylvia’s rigid, self-imposed regime of struggle towards self-expression was a labour of love, but it was self-focussed and fanatical, and it was accompanied by her agonizing fear of failure. She swung between joy at each success and despair at each failure. And in this unbalanced battle, in the dark “night” of her uncomprehending, unwise, unenlightened state, from that same agony of pure emotion which produced her tears came the “silent howl” – ‘O’-shaped, mouth-shaped, moon-shaped and tear-seeded – from which her moon-idol God emerged.

Sylvia’s ‘Poem for a Birthday’ (SPCP 131-137) seems to foretell this god’s appearance. In it, Sylvia enters the earthy Underworld darkness of the Moon Goddess, Hecate, - the “Lady” whose “moon’s vat” will help her “become another”, and in whose dark “bower at the lily root” a god will metamorphose to supervise the “witch-burning”. Sylvia prays to Hecate, “Mother of beetles” (who is also Earth Goddess, Queen of the Underworld and Goddess of the Dark Moon), for release, and vows to emerge from the fires robed in light. Finally, in ‘The Stones’, Love is the “bald nurse”¹⁹ who reconstructs Sylvia as a vase for the “elusive rose”, which is a common mystical symbol for the Divine Spirit. It is love like this which, in Ted’s poem, is shown by the woman who nurses the dead child; by Ted nursing Sylvia through the gestation of her new poetic Self; and by Sylvia, nursing that buried Self, which is “human” but dead, withered, and as “corrosive” as “Phosphorous” (a natural, element, poisonous if ingested but which, when exposed to air, spontaneously ignites and burns with a cold, luminous, moony and mercurial light).

The fiery idol, the moon, and the dead child, all are shells – reflectors of light with no light or life of their own. Yet from these, in ‘The God’, a child is born: and Sylvia feeds it like a mother. Its mouth-hole (another ‘O’-shaped, moon-shaped, howl-shaped image which is given a voracious unpleasantness by Ted’s choice of words) stirs, but its food is blood. Sylvia’s nipples “ooze” blood, and this “drip-feed” contaminates (by its proximity in Ted’s line) “Our happy moment” although, at the time, they were joyfully unaware of the true nature of this ‘child’.

The child, this “little god” in the “Elm Tree” (the capital letter on ‘Tree’ suggests the Elm’s symbolic status as a tree associated with death, magic and the Underworld), can only be Ariel, whose appearance both Ted and Sylvia happily recognized as the revelation of Sylvia’s true poetic voice. Ariel was, indeed, ‘Our Mercury’, the pure Mercurial Spirit released from within Sylvia. But whilst Mercury/Hermes is the guide of the Soul, god of eloquence and messenger of the gods, he is also psychopomp – the conductor of Souls through the Underworld; and he is as loved by Hecate, Queen of the Underworld, as he is by Zeus, his father. So, he may carry messages from either; and since he is also an eloquent liar, skilled in all kinds of magic and enchantment, and a clever trickster, he can never be trusted.

Sylvia, in ‘The God’, hears his “instructions” in her sleep – “glassy-eyed” as if mesmerised by his music. And even awake, she remained under his spell: writing automatically, “making” a new, bloody “sacrifice”, unable to explain how she did it or

why, or “who” prompted it. Meanwhile, the “little god”, Ariel-Mercury, laughed and roared in the dark orchard (a place from where one might expect only dark fruit could come).

So, at her desk, Sylvia fed her little god with whispers, drumming rhythms with her fingers²⁰, and hearing the echoes of “sea-voices” in the shells of her Winthrop childhood. The “effigy” she gave to Ted, the picture she drew of herself in her poems perhaps, or projected by her anger as she withdrew into her own dark world, was that of a Salvia (a fragile blue flower with which she shared her name) which had been “pressed” by the weight of the Lutheran rule of her father, who had once begun to train as a Lutheran minister. Salvia flower picture&Released now from that oppression, hunched and “secret” in her “hair-tent”, she became like a witch, or a High Priestess, serving a god of the Underworld in an hypnotic trance: and from her “Sleep”, “Darkness”²¹ began to pour into the world “like perfume”. But this perfume came from a burst “coffin”, and the light, too, was like the elusive, delusive, phosphorescent light of methane corpse-gas. Ted, “blinded” by that darkness, struck a light: but methane is explosive. After the brief hiatus (marked by a section break in his poem) he woke upside-down, totally disorientated and “giddy”, to find that he, too, was in the “spirit-house”, controlled by spirits and burning in the flames he had “unwittingly” lit in Sylvia.

Like an explosion in an Alchemist’s athanor at this critical stage, this violent explosion may have been the result of impurities in the mixture of Sulphur and Quicksilver, male and female, but Ted puts it’s immediate cause down to his own inattention to the delicate balance of the fires involved. Whatever the cause, the result, for Ted, was disastrous. His own Cabbalistic poetic journey and his life were overturned and suspended, and he returned again to the state of The Hanged Man. In the mythological matrix of Birthday Letters, however, he was not just Odin suspended upside-down on the Tree of Life, he was also, now that Sylvia was completely in the thrall of the dark, Underworld energies of the unconscious, the sacrificed husband or lover of the Goddess – the one who dies (as Dionysus died for Demeter; as Dumuzi died for Innana; as Osiris, Attis, Tamuz and others died) so that fertility might be restored to the world.

Like the religious fanatic with which ‘The God’ began, all Sylvia’s love was unconditionally focussed on the one thing which she believed to be essential to her. And if she did claim, as Ted says in his poem, that God was speaking through her, then Ted certainly would have been horrified. Always superstitious, he would have known that prophets who proclaim their status in that way invariably were burned to death as heretics or witches, or they were consumed by their own inner fires, by fanaticism, martyrdom or madness.

The voice of Ariel was heard in Sylvia’s poetry “for the next five months” (WP 188). It was as if Sylvia suddenly had access to her unconscious world, but it was a dark world of fierce anger and bitterness, full of blackness, atrocities, blood and death. The blood, as Ted made clear in many of the Birthday Letters poems, was her own: but there were “blood gobbets” of him there, too. In a letter which Ted wrote in 1989 to Anne Stevenson²², he referred to two of Sylvia’s poems, ‘Event’ and ‘Rabbit Catcher’, both

of which Sylvia wrote shortly after 'Elm', and both of which tell very personal "embryo stories". The "only thing" Ted had found "hard to understand" at that time, he told Anne Stevenson, was Sylvia's "sudden discovery of our bad moments" as "subjects for poems".

And Ted was not the only one Sylvia sacrificed to her 'God' in the cause of fertility and creative rebirth. Like one possessed, she offered all who loved her to the flames, used all their lives in her work, and fed the flames until she herself was consumed by them.

So, on this Path, Sylvia experienced all the energies of Hod and Netzach: Splendour, Glory, Victory, Endurance – but all were distorted by their Qlippoth of rigidity, habit, false ideology and Sylvia's fixed, unbending focus on her goal. So, Sylvia's victory was hollow – a burned out shell. The Ariel poems, as Ted wrote to Keith Sagar in 1998, were "double-tongued, triumph and doom"²³. The God who "embraced" her was not the gentle God of Love, but that God's dark twin, the terrible God of Darkness and Grief.

This "God of the euphemism Grief", ends Ted's poem, and ends his own Birthday Letters journeys along the Path of the Tower. But for what is "Grief" a "euphemism"? Pain, sorrow, desolation, martyrdom, incubus, hell on earth: these are just a few of the many synonyms offered by Roget's Thesaurus. But no word can express the true anguish of grief, so all words are merely euphemisms for that all-consuming state which is the darkest expression of love.

And what is the "story" of that God of Grief – the "story which has to be told" – but the story of the Quest, the shamanic journey? That is the story of "the flight to the spirit world" which Ted believed to be "the skeleton of thousands of folktales and myths" (of "Aztec" and "Black Forest" tales, for example, as well as the myths associated with the Mysteries) and of "many narrative poems" (Faas, UU 206). It is the story, too, of Sylvia's journey to self-healing and self-renewal, especially as Ted tells it in Birthday Letters and, in miniature, in the shamanic ecstasies of 'The God'. Her "compulsion", her "desperate" need to "tell everybody" her story was, as Ted said in his interview with Drue Heinz²⁴, an essential part of the shamanic poet's journey.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. 'Orghast', WP 126.
2. In the Bible, the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus (The Acts (9: 1-9) is an example of the transforming power of Divine revelation. So, too is the conversion of Buddha; and of such hermit saints as St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony.
3. Titus Burckhardt, in *Alchemy* (Element Books, 1987. pp. 161-166) provides an excellent account of the athanor and the three levels of generative fire associated with it.
4. Because the practical Alchemist is working with volatile materials, the danger of an

explosion as a chemical reaction takes place is very real. Hendrick Heerschops' painting, 'The Alchemist's Experiment Takes Fire' shows only a small explosion but some explosions were devastating.

5. For initiates who are immersed in the depths of the unconscious (as they were on the Path of the Devil) and are seeking the enlightenment which is possible on this Path, failure leaves them imprisoned in darkness and, possibly enslaved by the Lord of that darkness.

6. Picasso made many portraits of his close friend Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918). They shared an interest in magic, and Apollinaire was also an important avant-garde writer and poet who coined the term 'Orphism' for a form of abstract art created entirely from "conceived rather than received reality". He is, therefore, an appropriate figure to appear in 'Your Paris', where Ted's and Sylvia's vision of the world is Orphic in just this way.

7. At that time, Sylvia certainly saw her writing, too, in terms of painting and drawing. In a letter written from Paris on 4 July 1956 (SPLH), she likened writing to "a powerful canvas on which other people live and move...".

8. At Delphi, the tympanon announced the birth of Iacchos. At Eleusis, an instrument called an echion – "an enormous contrivance with a nerve-shattering effect, which the Greek theatre employed to imitate thunder" announced the birth, amidst fire and smoke, of the holy child Brimos to "the goddess of the underworld", Persephone. This moment marked the return of Demeter's daughter from the underworld and the renewal of the fertility of Earth. Kerenyi, Eleusis, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1967. pp. 83-4, 94.

9. "made a note of" is a beautifully ambiguous phrase which suggests both sound and writing. Grammatically, it is part of the sentence about the stolen water bag, but it occurs immediately after a section break which graphically suggests the way in which PAUM! swallows everything which has gone before.

10. Old names for the tarot card of The Tower were 'The House of the Devil' and 'The House of God'. Shiva combines these titles, and the sexual imagery of the Tower is repeated in the Lingam.

11. By my calculation, the Gematria of the word 'PAUM' is: $80 + 1 + 6 + 600 = 687$. These three numbers (6, 7 and 8) are the ruling numbers of this Path. Added together, they reduce to 3, which is the number of the Divine Triangle in which the All Father and the All Mother are joined to the Source. 3 is also the number of the Word, of perfect harmony and of revelation.

12. The daffodil is often called 'The Herald of Spring' because of the golden, trumpet shape of its flower, and because it is amongst the first of the Spring flowers to appear.

13. Perhaps the oldest surviving Holy picture of Mother and Child is the Ancient

Egyptian papyrus painting of Isis suckling the holy infant Horus. The same grouping of Goddess and holy child was common in votive offerings made at Greek sites associated with the Cult of Persephone. It survives in Christian iconography as images of the Virgin and the infant Jesus, often with a third child present who is identified as the infant John the Baptist.

14. Many practical alchemists recorded the sudden dazzling luminescence which heralded the final stages of the process, although it did not guarantee success in making gold. A well-known painting by Joseph Wright of Derby (d. 1274) illustrates this moment.

15. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 76, Note 28.

16. St. Thomas Aquinas is reputed to be the author of *Aurora consurgens*.

17. 'Elm' (SPCP 192-3) is dated 19 April 1962. The daffodil photograph which is reproduced in Sylvia's published journals is dated 22 April 1962. Nowhere in his poem does Ted speak of a photograph, or specify a precise date for his "picture".

18. St Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) was founder of the Discalced Carmelite order of nuns, an eremitic, ascetic order which followed the Carmelite Rule of prayer, solitude, silence and perpetual abstinence and fasting. In her autobiography, *The Way of Perfection*, she wrote (and Sylvia copied into her journal) of "devil" inspired hallucinations which filled her with terror; and of the devil being present at her death bed (SPJ Appendix 10. 44 [a-b], 45 [b] - 46 [a]).

19. The Moon Goddess in her light-reflecting form is Selene, Venus, Goddess of Love: the obverse of Hecate, Goddess of the Underworld. Together, these were Sylvia's "strange muse, bald, white and wild, in her 'hood of bone'..." ('Sylvia Plath: Ariel', WP 161).

20. Drumming on her thumb with her fingers (checking the rhythms of her lines as she wrote), Sylvia made 'o'-shaped, moon-shaped circles. The thumb is phallic. In Palmistry, it rises from the Mount of the Moon and belongs to Venus and Hecate; so, it is beloved by witches: "By the pricking of my thumbs / something wicked this way comes": *Macbeth* 4 1:46.

21. The position and the capital 'S' and 'D' of these words gives them emphasis and suggest a reference to Morpheus, son of Hypnos (brother of Death), and the darkness of Hades in which Morpheus dwells.

22. Ted Hughes's letter to Anne Stevenson, quoted in Malcolm, J. *The Silent Woman*, PanMacmillan, London, 1994. p. 143.

23. Letter from Ted Hughes to Keith Sagar, 18 June 1998. British Library: DEP 10003 (9).

24. The Paris Review, Vol. 37, No. 134. Spring 1995. pp. 7-8.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalStar cardTzaddi path
The Path of The Star – Tzaddi

Tarot card 17. Tree Path 18.

Joining Sephiroth 7 (Netzach) and 9 (Yesod).

'You Hated Spain', 'Karlsbad Caverns', 'The Rabbit Catcher', 'Freedom of Speech'.

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The Mercurial Spirit which was freed on the Path of Pé, is the Divine Spark – that fragment of Divine energy which lies buried in all living creatures – the Divine Child of the Mother Earth Goddess who is Binah, Mother of All. Some of the oldest names for the Earthly manifestation of Binah are Inanna, Ishtar, Astarte, Demeter and Cybele. Her titles on this Path of Tzaddi are 'The Daughter of the Firmament' and 'The Dweller between Waters'¹; and her imminence on Earth is signified by the presence of the 'star' Venus in our skies.

Venus, which is both the Morning Star (Venus) and the Evening Star (Lucifer / Mercury), is the star which lights the Path of Tzaddi – the Path of the Star. And on this Path, the numbers of Venus (7) and Mercury (8) are completed by the addition of 10 (which represents all manifest creation) so that the Cabbalistic number for this Path is 18, and its Tarot number is 17. The Sephiroth which this Path connects are Netzach (7, Victory) and Yesod (9, Foundation). And the governing Element of this Path is Air, the natural element of the Mercurial Child: but the darkness of Saturn, who eats his children, is also present.

The Mother Goddess's symbols are an eight-pointed star, or rosette; and, also, the crescent moon and cow's horns, both of which identify her as consort of the Sun God – the Bull of Heaven – and signify their shared role in the Earthly cycles of Nature. The seven-pointed star is hers, too, in her manifestation as Venus / Aphrodite. And the energies of 7, which emanate from the Sephira of Netzach, transmit the life force of

Nature, with all its unconscious drives and emotions, to the Path of Tzaddi. The traveller on this Path must learn to balance these powerful energies with those of Yesod (Sephira 9), which acts as an interface between all the upper Paths of the Tree and their final expression in the Kingdom of the World – Malkuth (Sephira 10).

The Astrological ruler of this Path is Aquarius, The Water Carrier. And water is an important symbol on the Traditional Tarot card for this Path of the Star, which shows a young woman, kneeling beside a pool and pouring water from her two pitchers. Nothing in the calm demeanour of this woman suggests her power. But the brilliant eight-pointed star above her head, and the shower of seven-pointed stars (or flowers) falling around her, identify her as Astarte / Venus. She kneels on the earth, demonstrating her presence in our world, but she rests one foot on pool-waters which have been variously identified as the Waters of Life, the Bitter Sea of Binah, and the dark chaotic waters of the unconscious. Here she is, naked and in human form, with all her powers symbolically unveiled.

To encounter the Goddess thus is both awe-inspiring and dangerous. In the Tarot card, the flower which blooms on the hill behind her suggests her generative and life-giving powers. But the black bird, perched atop a tree close by, is a reminder of her other role as Hag, Death Goddess and Queen of the Underworld. So, to bear the full, unveiled force of her energies requires both courage and skill. Those to whom the Goddess chooses to reveal herself – those whose Spirit she will baptize in her waters and fill with her energies – are close to the end of their quest: and the Cabbalistic meditation for this Path – ‘In the Star lies the Gate of the Sanctuary’² – suggests the proximity of their goal. But the newly born Divine Spirit is as vulnerable as any new soul: it is “walking bare”³, just as Ted described the newborn creature in the Alchemy of Cave Birds (CB 54). And the Goddess, like the ‘Owl Flower’ in that same sequence, is the “Big terror” whose stormy embrace will test them to the limit.

Those who see the Goddess’s naked beauty are enthralled and inspired. They may also be seduced and entranced by her deathly powers. So, they become hooked like a fish on a line, along which the energies flow each way. The Hebrew letter for this Path, Tzaddi (meaning ‘fish-hook’ or ‘to hunt’), holds similar symbolic meaning. Its shape combines ‘Yod’ (hand) of the Divine Source with ‘Nun’ (meaning fish), and it is said to represent the Life Force running upwards towards the Source and returning downwards again to the enlightened quester on this Path – the Tzaddik⁴ – the fisher.

Such an image would have had special appeal to Ted, for whom fishing was an activity which held a very special place in his life and (frequently metaphorically) in his poems. Fishing, as he told Terry Gifford in a letter in 1994⁵, was a way of sinking himself into “evolution’s mutual predation system”, and he likened it to “Jung’s description of his therapy as a way of putting human beings back into contact with the primitive human animal. Meaning – most neuroses, of individuals and of cultures – result from the loss of contact”. This link with our own deepest predatory instincts allows for that to-fro flow of energy symbolized in the letter Tzaddi. It is part of the imagery of ‘Earth Numb’ (THSP 193-4) and of many of Ted’s other fishing poems. And often, his anglers (hunting for

fish, for poems, for the Source or for all of these) wade into dark waters where the fish are spirits, holy creatures which inhabit a primordial world intimately connected to our own.

Astarte picture

The Mother Goddess, like the fisherman and the fish in such poems as 'Earth Numb' and 'Pike' (THSP 41), is both hunter and hunted. The oldest images of her as Innana – Astarte show her carrying her crescent bow and surrounded by star-tipped arrows. In Sumeria, she was known as the lioness, "Labbatu"⁶, and her animals, always, have been the lion, the tiger, the panther, and all the predatory cats which have her hunting instincts and skills in their blood. On Earth, she has taken many forms: a hare, an owl, a bitch otter, a fox, a trout – all animals which are associated with darkness, the moon and witchcraft – all animals which are hunted, often with customary ritual the meaning of which has long been forgotten.

Hunting is part of her energies and is part of the essential life-blood of all her creatures. Hunter and hunted, eating and being eaten, each is necessary to survival in nature: and we, too, are part of Nature and share that hunting instinct, even though we may choose to use it in different, less bloody ways⁷. The mystery of death, then, like the mystery of life connects us directly with the Goddess and through her to the Source; and it is the acceptance and use of all her energies which must be learned on this Path where her star shines so brightly.

'You Hated Spain' (BL 22) is the poem on this Path in the Atziluthic World, and from the start of the poem Ted deals with Sylvia's fear of death.

Spain (where Ted and Sylvia spent most of their honeymoon⁸) was described by the Spanish poet, Lorca, as "a country of death. A country open to death"⁹. And Lorca's concept of Duende, with its intimate relationship to death, the creative arts and healing, is an important part of the archetypal framework of Ted's poem. Duende, as Lorca described it, comes only when "death is possible". Like the Goddess's energies it is a "mystery" which "burns in the blood" – a dark, violent mystery which must be fought with "by every man and every artist" in the struggle for perfection. Ted referred to Lorca's Duende in his own essay on the roots of Baskin's art. There, he described it as "the core of life", "the organizing and creative energy itself", which flourishes "in the bloodstream" and which is "simultaneously holy and anathema" (WP 92). Ted linked it closely with the ancient Mother Earth Goddess as Death Goddess (WP 91), and he, too, believed that this "'horror' within the created 'glory'" is expressed in true art, where it is the source of healing.

The recognition of this violent energy and its power and 'glory' were part of the lesson Sylvia needed to learn on her first journey along the Path of the Star: and this was what she did begin to learn in Spain.

Although Ted and Sylvia shared this journey, it seems that Ted had already learned some of the lessons of this Path. He had grown up in a place deeply marked by poverty,

war and death. He was familiar with the fascination and the raw violence of hunting and fishing, and had already discovered ways of channelling some of his predatory instincts into his poetry. He felt “at home” in Spain and familiar with its dark, Moorish passions, and he believed that on his father’s side of the family there had even been a Moorish ancestor.

Nothing like this had been part of Sylvia’s experience or her education, and she found the rawness, the poverty, and the constant reminders of violence and death hard to bear. She was clearly fascinated by the different culture and it provided her with some good material for her writing. But she flinched away from the dark passions and the nightmarish undercurrents that she instinctively recognized in Spanish life. Her poems, in particular, became analytical and cold, as if she feared to let any of those energies loose in her imagination. But, significantly, one of the rare moments of fluency in the poems Sylvia wrote at that time¹⁰, is her description, in ‘The Goring’ (SPCP 49), of the “art” and the “dance” of bull and picador at the moment when the bull turns and gores the man. This is not exactly the “moment of the kill” which Lorca described when he wrote that Duende was at its “most impressive” in the bullfight, but it was a moment when Duende had irrupted into the bullfight which Sylvia and Ted had watched in Madrid.

The bull’s sudden, instinctive, deadly burst of power and the man’s bloody defeat were, Sylvia told her mother in a letter, “the most satisfying moment” in a ritual which had until then “disgusted and sickened” both her and Ted (SPLH 14 July 1956). In her poem, she tried to convey the horrible beauty of that moment. She caught the sudden, awed “hush” of the crowd and the “faultless”, a-morality and perfection of the horning, and she noted the “redeeming” power of the spilled blood: but she recognized none of the bull’s deadly instinctive powers within herself.

Ted, however, saw in retrospect how that moment, and that poem, opened a path to Sylvia’s own inner nightmares – to those buried horrors within her which she would eventually confront and conquer in her poetry. In ‘You Hated Spain’, Ted vividly conveys the ugly ritual of the bullfight, the blood, the fear and the botched, messy butchering of the “bewildered” bulls. His picture, too, of the goading is ugly, and it is made more so by his image of a horn in a “blowfly belly” – a wound which differs dramatically from the thigh wound which Sylvia described to her mother. Ted’s version, however, suggests the possibility of new life emerging from a deadly wound: rather as the Biblical Samson found bees and honey in the lion’s carcase.

In fact, the belly is a common alchemical symbol for the place of transmutation, and the whole alchemical process of death, putrefaction and rebirth is summed up in Samson’s riddle:

Out of the eater came forth meat,
And out of the strong came forth sweetness (Judges 14: 14)
Nor is the horn in Ted’s poem specifically a bull’s horn. It could also belong to the Goddess whose nightmare land of dreams it opens up for Sylvia in this poem; the

Goddess who devours her children and whose Earthy 'belly' is the dark tomb-womb of death and life.

Paradoxically, in Ted's poem this nightmare land of dreams is both in and around Sylvia. He describes it as a land full of horrors which she dared not wake "with" and yet it was also the place she could not wake up "from". It was her own heart of darkness, a "juju land" which was as much part of her as her "African lips"¹¹. In Spain, although she did not understand its "language" of death, she instinctively recognized that darkness and recoiled. Yet, in the paintings of Bosch (perhaps in his triptychs "Earthly Delights" and "The Haywain" in the Madrid Prado, which deal with the Fall of Man and are full of imaginary, surreal, half-human creatures indulging in all the real and perverted 'pleasures' of our fallen world¹²) Sylvia was touched by the "spidery hand" of the Goddess and she saw how horrors could be transformed into art. And in her own poem, 'Spider' (SPCP 48 - 9), she turned to Anansi, the Mercurial spider trickster-god of African and Caribbean folktales, to convey the "barbarous" truth of death and life in our world¹³.

In 'Anansi', too, Sylvia transformed an actual event in which she and Ted had spent half-an-hour "playing god", as she put it in her journal (SPJ 14 Aug. 1956), into a kind of parable of human arrogance and hypocrisy. She did not spell out this parable, and quite possibly she was not consciously aware of making it, for the "black deus ex machina" in her poem is not two human beings misusing their own predatory powers to disturb the natural balance, but the spider which is hunting ants for food. Her poem, however, does show her awareness of the fact that, to us, the hunt may look like a game, the hunter like a predator satisfying its lust, and the continuing unbroken activity of the group from which the prey is chosen like a lack of "scruple". All of which moral sentiments we humans frequently apply, inappropriately, to the purely instinctive actions of animals which hunt only to eat. Yet, at the same time, we either refuse to acknowledge our own deliberate killing 'games' or, as in the bullfight or in war, we rationalize our actions in some way¹⁴.

In her poem, Sylvia did not acknowledge any moral scruple over the deadly game she and Ted had played with the ants and flies; nor did she let any real feelings seep into the poem. She did not spell out any analogy between the creatures' lives and our own. But she echoed the excuse humans frequently use to avoid responsibility when she suggested that the ants lacked scruple because they were "obeying orders", although she exonerated them by the phrase "of instinct" which immediately follows, and she made nothing more of this echo.

In Spain, Sylvia clearly became acutely aware of the ugliness beneath the civilized veneer: the "Goya funeral grin"¹⁵ which lay beneath the surface of Spanish life. But Ted saw more in her reaction to this than simple recoil: he saw hate, fear and panic. And in retrospect he understood that such excess was Sylvia's instinctive, self-defensive response to the recognition of some similar, threatening ugliness within herself. Yet this recognition was still unconscious. Sylvia, at this time stood on the edge of her own exploration of her subconscious world, but she was unaware of this. Ted's final vision of her in 'You Hated Spain' suggests many things, but above all it shows Sylvia as the

“new soul” she was on this Path. Here, alone at the edge of the Goddess’s waters, lit by the Goddess’s moon, she waits naively for a “ferry” to carry her to safety. She is still happy; still does not understand that her “honeymoon” world has changed. All her poems are “still to be found”: but to find them she must wake, enter these waters, and learn to deal with the horrors of her inner world.

‘Karlsbad Caverns’ (BL 99 - 101), on the Path of the Star in the World of Briah, was another of the poems which Ted returned to the Birthday Letters sequence shortly before it was published. It is one of Ted’s simplest descriptions of a phenomenon of Nature. And it is one of the most straightforward of the Birthday Letters poems in Cabbalistic terms, for it describes, very clearly, the ‘Vision of the Machinery of the Universe’, which is the Spiritual Experience of Yesod (Sephira 9) on this Path.

The bats’ world, unlike that of the humans in this poem, is a “complete” world; a world wholly ruled (with ‘clockwork’ precision) by instinct; a world “connected” to the “machinery” of Nature. Ted’s imagery is mechanical, but the part the bats play in keeping this cosmic machinery running smoothly is clear. They are the necessary oil in its works: that is their purpose, their value and their meaning. Without them, the balance of Nature would change and so, according to the “unfailing logic of the earth” in which everything is precisely linked to everything else, the whole cosmic pattern would be affected: Even such a tiny, fragile, “goblin” as the bat is an essential part of the whole.

Other aspects of Yesod’s energies which are apparent in the imagery of this poem, are the way these bats funnel subterranean energies into our world: they embody Yesod’s function as an interface between us and the mysterious cosmic powers. And, like the bat in ‘9 Willow Street’ (BL 71 74), they are emissaries of the Mother Earth Goddess, they live in her dark caves, and they do her work. The Earth Goddess’s powers of glamour and deception, together with Yesod’s own link with the Moon and the imagination, make this a dangerous Path to negotiate safely. It is a place of transformation and Yesod may function as a Shaman’s tunnel, allowing access to and from the Otherworld, but the Illusion of Yesod is Security; and its Vice is Idleness. All its energies are fluid and tricky and must be carefully balance with those of Netzach (7).

In ‘Grand Canyon’ (BL 96 - 98), the poem which immediately precedes ‘Karlsbad Caverns’ in this Cabbalistic journey, the Mercurial Spirit within the material body was dramatically released. Now, Ted and Sylvia were in new territory in more ways than one. They had certainly not visited the Karlsbad Caverns in New Mexico before, but in a trip where everything was new to them that hardly warranted special mention. What was significant, however, was the new inner world each was “visiting” on this Path, the new Self each was discovering, and the new world-view they each might form because of this.

Ted embeds this thought at the heart of the poem, immediately after the sudden “torrent” of millions of bats has detached itself from the “stone heavens” of their cathedral-like caves and has snaked out and away. The precise timing, the number of bats and the flies they would consume, the huge distance they would travel, and the

centuries-old regularity of this phenomenon are awe-inspiring. So, too, for Ted and Sylvia would have been the smoky, snaky, dragonish vision of these goblin representatives of the Goddess irrupting from the earth as if through a “key-hole”. No wonder it stirred thoughts of rebuke about their own “half-participation”, their own meaning and their own indecision.

Storm picture

Here, at Karlsbad, they were at a natural interface between the dark underground of earth and the open light of the sky: and also at a similar interface in their Cabbalistic journey into their inner worlds. The bats were like some huge beast emerging from the darkness, but Ted and Sylvia were indolent, uncommitted, unsure whether to “stay that night or go”. Only when the bats returned amidst thunder and lightning, did they really pay attention to them. “We stared and we saw” : this phrase, with its own internal rhythm stressing the two actions, is set on its own for emphasis. And what Ted and Sylvia saw, “through the bats”, was the terrifying power of Nature: the thunder and lightning, the “mushrooming” clouds, and the Mercurial “genie” of bats detaching themselves “from the love that moves the sun and the other stars” and returning to the dark safety of their cave.

That this sight has both literal and metaphorical meaning in the poem is made clear in the final stanza where Ted conflates the two meanings of ‘see’. There, the open eyes of the bats signify knowledge – they “know how” and they “know when” not to fly in the face of Nature’s power. Unlike Ted and Sylvia, who have yet to learn this lesson, they know how to protect themselves from the love that is the motive force of the universe – the love that underlies everything, as it does in the final line of the poem. Yet, neat as this final summing up of the poem and its lesson may seem, there is, as in Nature, enormous complexity hidden in its seeming simplicity.

“Unlike us” (Ted chose a pronoun which universalised his statement) bats are almost wholly ruled by instinct: they know but they do not understand. This is our common behavioural view of bats and it underpins the human belief that we, who can both know and understand, are in some way superior to them. Part of the lesson on this Path is that we are not. We are different, but, like all the Goddess’s creatures, we are equally subject to her laws. The love which moves the universe moves us too. And Ted, in the final line of this poem, deliberately gives ‘love’ a lower-case ‘l’ so that it denotes the natural, emotion of love, rather than some Divine Source.

Much depends, here, on our definition of love, but it is generally accepted that the emotions of love are strong, irrational and ungovernable, and their motive power is immense. Unlike most animals, we use our mental powers to try and control our response to these emotions and we construct protective frameworks – rules and moral codes – to help us deal with them. So, in human society, we make a distinction between love and lust, and hedge an instinctive drive around with moral terms. This instinctive drive is a fundamental part of the bat’s “complete world” and of their place in the cosmic machinery. Unlike us, they respond to it as directly as they do to the drive to hunt and eat flies, and to the instinct for self-preservation. For us, however, mind may help or

hinder our response to all these instincts. With our minds we can evaluate and decide; will action or inaction; and bring endurance and force of Netzach to each situation. But still, we must learn firstly to recognize and 'know' the instinctive, a-moral, essential drives within us, then we must learn how and when to use them wisely. Uncontrolled, in us and in our society, they will wreak havoc: equally, if we deny them or misdirect them they will destroy us. Ted believed this to be particularly true for Shamanic poets, for whom the energies of Yesod and its function as an interface with the Otherworld are vital¹⁶. But for all of us, the necessary balance of instinct and mind, and of Yesodic and Netzachic energies, requires constant vigilance and care.

In 'The Rabbit Catcher' (BL 144 - 146), Ted and Sylvia again meet the energies of Yesod and Netzach, and, now, they are in the World of Yetzirah, where their poems will take shape and form.

Sylvia, at this stage in the journey was especially sensitive to the Yesodic energies. The perfect Mercurial light on the precious Path had announced the birth of her Ariel Spirit. Now, it was essential that she learned to control this unruly new-born 'child'.

Ariel's 'birth' took place in April, and was heralded by the Dawn Goddess, Eos. But from the very beginning of 'The Rabbit Catcher' the Goddess is present in her most fecund, fertile, fickle and dangerous form. In May, she is both Death-in-Life and May Queen. For centuries, at Beltane on May-Eve, fire ceremonies were held in order to disperse her mischievous spirits of darkness – fairies and furies, witches and goblins – so that people, fields and livestock might prosper. And her fertile powers were invoked in May Day ceremonies, where she and her Greenwood consort (the Green Man or, often, Robin Hood) were feted with music, dancing and general freedom from all customary social restraints.

May blossom picture

May, when the deathly perfume of the Goddess's Hawthorn blossom (known as 'May') hangs over the countryside, is traditionally a dangerous month. Her moods, like her weather, change from moment-to-moment according to her whims, and all life is vulnerable. Her green witchcraft and the magical allure of her Spring presence are hard to resist: but her Moon, which controls the winds and tides and the rhythms of fertility and life, can also cause madness and conflict¹⁷.

This is the "quirky", treacherous power in Ted's poem, where the moon seems so suddenly to have set him and Sylvia to "bleeding each other". But it is Sylvia, in particular, who responds to it and is possessed by "dybbuk furies". Ted sees her behaviour as crazy, inexplicable, un-natural. He waits for her "to come back to nature", but nothing in the nature which surrounds her pleases her. She hates its fences, its farms, its "private kingdoms". Anything which represents restriction and "private greed" fuels her anger. They drive "West, West", and Ted repeats the word in the poem like an exclamation, because West is the legendary direction of the Promised Land: but Sylvia makes it plain that Cornwall is not her Promised Land.

And Ted sees this whole scene as a “domestic drama” – his domestic drama – but one in which he is somehow prevented from participating. He sees Sylvia’s fury directed at everything connected with him: his presence offends her; she rejects his country and its ocean; even the children are “hurled” into the car and are fed with a scowl. Her reaction to the rabbit snares is an instantaneous expression of her emotions, and her actions go against every country value Ted holds sacred. Their views of hunting, in particular, are diametrically opposed: and neither, perhaps, takes a balanced view of it.

Yet, although Sylvia rationalizes her destruction of the rabbit snares, so that Ted recognized what she “saw” in them and how it opposed his own view of them, he came to understand that the snares and the trapper were not the true source of her consuming rage. This was a rage which cared “nothing for rabbits”, but Sylvia herself was like a snared rabbit suffocating in its grip: and she lashed out instinctively in self-protection, just as the bull did that day in the bullfight she and Ted saw in Madrid. This, then, was like Duende: dangerous, destructive energy from the Source, suddenly flowing through Sylvia, directed at all restraint and badly needing to be controlled.

In his poem, Ted considers that Sylvia may have intuited some subconscious, threatening darkness in himself. But he suggests, too, that it was her own “doomed”, “tortured”, “self”, the same buried, trapped self which drove her need to write, which had suddenly been released and which she now had to control. “Whichever” it was, Sylvia began to trap those energies in her poems, manipulating them and containing them there. And in the last four lines of his poem, Ted suggests the “terrible”, sensual care with which she did this, feeling the poem alive and feeling its “smoking entrails” come soft into her hands. This is very like the sensual, almost sexual, excitement of the rabbit catcher in Sylvia’s poem of that title (SPCP 193 - 4). And in that poem, too, Sylvia tightens the noose of the snare on her own relationship with Ted.

Ted describes the “hypersensitive fingers” of the final “verse” of Sylvia’s poem, which closed round their relationship. He must also have been aware that by referring to their relationship in the past tense in the ritual framework of her poem, Sylvia had magically killed it there. But, ensnaring and controlling her anger in the lines of her poem, Sylvia created another snare to explain her reasons. So, the very depth and strength of the relationship she shared with Ted became “tight wires”; and their shared thoughts and endeavours became a single “mind” which, like a noose, was closing on some un-named “quick” thing. Sylvia’s use of ‘quick’, rather than ‘living’, suggests the so-called ‘quickening’ of a foetus, and, since the shared endeavour was a poetic rebirth, she seems to suggest that some nascent poetic life was being threatened. Whatever that living thing was, in the final two lines of her “verse”, she linked its plight directly with herself.

Thus, in her poem, Sylvia dissected her relationship with Ted and left the “smoking entrails” there on the page for all to see. But the ambiguity of Ted’s phrase, “felt it alive”, encompasses the life of the poem Sylvia created, and the Poetic Self she was nurturing as she wrote and shaped it, as well as the life in their relationship which, because she felt it as a threatening “constriction”, she instinctively turned-on in self-defence.

The furies of that day in May, the way in which Sylvia used them as subject matter for her poem¹⁸, and the way that, finally, she directed them at their relationship, were all things which, at the time, Ted did not understand. But in the context of this particular Path in their Cabbalistic journey, the source of these energies and the lesson Sylvia did learn about channelling them into her poems, are both very clear.

'Freedom of Speech' (BL 192) is the last poem on this Path and it is a poem full of ghosts and spirits, as befits its position so close to the Underworld in the World of Assiah.

Sylvia and Ariel both are present (although Sylvia did not live to celebrate her sixtieth birthday); her dead father is a ghostly participant; her mother and her children are there in spirit; so, too, are the spirits of old and new friends and of many others. The "whole reunion" is conjured up in Ted's imagination; and he sees Sylvia and Ariel lit, not by sunlight, but by the "cake's glow".

Birthday cakes (traditionally round in shape) were, originally, cakes eaten at feasts which celebrated the death and rebirth of a god. They had sacrificial and totemic significance, and the candles associated with them were small fire-rituals intended to ward off evil spirits and protect the new-born soul. In folk-lore, too, the candle flame itself is often believed to be a naked soul. In feasts associated with Innana / Astarte in her manifestation as Moon Goddess, round Moon-cakes were offered to her. And, with the ambiguous 'your' in the first line of this poem, Ted once again identifies Sylvia with the Goddess.

In this dim, Earthy World of Assiah, the manifestation of the Goddess which Ted chose for his poem was the old Phrygian Mother Earth Goddess, Cybele, the Goddess of Caves. Ariel, whose name means 'lion', is Cybele's creature: lions draw Cybele's chariot and sit on either side of her throne¹⁹. Ariel (notably genderless in Ted's poem) sits on her "knuckle" (another ambiguous 'your', here, encompasses Sylvia and the Goddess) and is fed with grapes from her mouth: "a black one" the colour of her earth, her cave, her night and "a green one", the colour of her fertile land²⁰. The grapes, too, are a symbol of her husband/son Attis (another form of Dionysus); and the laughter (like the intoxicated laughter caused by fermented grapes) is like the unrestrained joy of Cybele's priests at the festival which greeted her return, with Attis, from the Underworld²¹.

Poppy picture

The poppies, too, are the Goddess's flowers. Sylvia called them "little hell flames", "bloodied skirts", and "a lovely gift" in her two poppy poems²², where she accurately conveyed their symbolism as flowers of narcosis, enchantment, death and resurrection. In Ted's poem, they are "late poppies", Autumn poppies. And, just as the Goddess disrobes as she enters the Underworld and winter's bareness comes to her earth, one "loses a petal"²³.

Sylvia's was born in the Autumn: her natal birthday was 27 October 1932. But her poetic rebirth and the 'birth' of Ariel took place in April 1962, and Sylvia acknowledged this when she chose *A Birthday Present* as one of her earliest titles for her book of Ariel poems ('Introduction' SPCP.5). April, too, was always the month of the return of the Goddess from the Underworld with her son/lover and the renewal of fertility on Earth. So, Sylvia and the Goddess shared this April birthday as a time of birth and rebirth.

It is not just months that are important in Ted's poem, however. Years are important, too. And to explain this, it is necessary to look closely at the dates of some of Sylvia's poems and at the way in which her concern with birth and rebirth recurs in them.

Early in 1962, Sylvia began to date and keep all the drafts of her poems ('Introduction' SPCP 17), so dates, apparently, had become important to her. The poem '*A Birthday Present*' (SPCP 206 - 8), from which Sylvia took the proposed title for her book, is dated September 1962, several months after her Ariel voice was born. In this poem, as if she were aware that the birth of Ariel was not the end of her quest, Sylvia asks for a revelation. And the imagery she used – choosing words like 'annunciation', 'enormity', 'veils' and 'transparencies' – is very like the Cabbalistic imagery in which the Goddess, mediator of Divine energies and Guardian of the Gate of the Sanctuary, conceals the Divine Source behind veils of illusion. In this poem, too, Sylvia expresses great impatience: and she does not want to have to wait until she is "sixty" to receive her "gift". Then, on her thirtieth birthday a few weeks later she wrote two amazing poems about rebirth – '*Ariel*' (SPCP 239-40) and '*Poppies in October*' (SPCP 240).

In '*Ariel*', Sylvia merged her energies with those of "God's lioness", to fly like an arrow (which in Cabbala flies directly up the central column of the Tree to the Source) into the rising sun. In '*Poppies in October*', she celebrated a blooming, a "gift", a fresh blue dawn which breaks up a "forest of frost". And in the poems she wrote in the next few weeks, she wrote of the stirring of the veil ('*Purdah*') and a rebirth ('*Lady Lazarus*'); and, most importantly, love lit up her poems ('*Nick and the Candlestick*', '*The Couriers*') before the darkness began to close in on her again.

Sylvia was thirty when she used her poetic magic to merge her energies with those of Ariel and fly to the sun. In Cabbalistic terms, thirty (3 x 10) is the age at which the Mother Goddess (3, the number of Binah) may channel her energies through the Initiate into our world (10, Malkuth). But the power, the balance and, especially, the self-control necessary to direct those energies for whatever purpose the Initiate chooses, is not easily learned or easily applied. Astrologically, too, thirty is an age at which the planet Saturn exerts its influence most powerfully in our lives²⁴. Clearly, with two such powerful deities present in Sylvia's life at that time, it was appropriate that she should attempt her flight to the Source, but it was an extremely dangerous thing for her to do. Ted's analysis of Sylvia's journey along the earlier Paths in *Birthday Letters* has already suggested that she was not sufficiently prepared. And her choice of Ariel as her steed – Ariel who was either Mercury or Lucifer depending on which aspect of his Mother Goddess he was representing – only increased the danger.

Ariel's 'birth' was a 'Victory' for Sylvia, a sign that she was making use of Netzach's powers, but it was a victory which was overshadowed by the darker side of Yesod. Disastrously, Sylvia was too strongly influenced by the Illusion of Yesod: Her world view was unbalanced, she was too ready to identify with Ariel and too sure that she was right to proceed as she did. All these illusions, too, were exacerbated by the Goddess's own lunar powers of enchantment and possession: And the Goddess, like Saturn, eats her children.

Had Sylvia been self-controlled and patient enough to wait for her sixtieth birthday, her own maturity would almost certainly have brought more wisdom, experience and balance, and she would have had more control over Ariel. At sixty, astrologically, Saturn's influence is again strongly present in our lives. And at sixty (6×10) the Goddess's powers ($3 + 3$) are doubled, but they are directed through Tiphereth (Sephira 6, The Way) at the heart of the Tree and are channelled from Malkuth (10) directly up the Path of the Arrow to the Source. So, all the energies would again have been in place, and Sylvia might have successfully completed her journey.

Sylvia died at the age of thirty but she had brought Ariel into the world and Ariel's strong, ambivalent energies live on in Sylvia's poems. In 'Freedom of Speech', Ted, like a Tzaddi fishing for fragments of soul – pieces of the broken vessel of a failed Creation – gathers up Ariel and returns this wayward child to Cybele's cave. Sylvia is there, in the semi-darkness, and many others too: notably, all those who have benefited from or been influenced by Sylvia's freedom of speech and the lack of restraint in her writing and publishing. Notably, too, her immediate family, although there in spirit, are not present in the cave's gloom, and Ted himself is not a participant. Everybody but Sylvia and Ted are delighted and full of laughter: the candle-tips (little soul-flames) tremble with joy; the stars, too, (more little spirits – flickering sparks in the Goddess's dark sky) shake as if racked with laughter. But there is no real merriment about Ted's poem: and only the movement of the stars and candle-tips suggest the intemperate, all encompassing, nature of that laughter²⁵.

And "what about Ariel?", Ted asks. What indeed? Ted's question is thought-provoking. And if Ted really was intent on creating a magical healing ritual in the Cabbalistic poetic journey of Birthday Letters, then the numbers associated with Ariel in this poem are important.

Ariel is named in the poem four times, and so associated with the Platonic number of stability and Earth, and the Sephira Chesed's energies of Mercy and Love. There are four stanzas to reinforce these associations; with five lines in each to bring the Justice of Gevurah to bear. Ariel, as is the practice in ritual magic, is named three times in the final stanza, the final time stating that "Ariel is happy to be here": here, Ariel is contained within Ted's poem; here, Ariel is back in his Mother Goddess's cave and under her control. And the seriousness of this whole magical, poetic ritual, is underlined by the seriousness of Ted's final, separate line.

This may be a comforting scenario, but another meaning of 'here' is also possible. Ariel

is, as has already been noted, still here in our world and still has a powerful influence on readers of Sylvia's poems. Ariel, no doubt, is happy to be here: and the Mercurial energies Ariel embodies are essential in our world. Ariel's energies, of course, are also present in the world through Ted's poem, but the poem is notably sober in mood (in spite of all the laughter it describes), thus providing a balance for the fiery energies released in Sylvia's poems. Importantly, Ted does not destroy the Ariel spirit in his poem, only confines its energies within a ritual framework, and returns it to the cave-womb of the Mother Goddess ready for rebirth. But the use Sylvia made of Ariel's voice was quite different.

Freedom of speech is a necessary liberty, but it requires the utmost self-control: without that, it can be costly. Words, especially, carry the gods' power. They are regarded as supremely powerful in religion, in Cabbala, and in Cabbalistic magic. The Word on the breath of the Source created our material universe; and the word of the Divine child is the worldly expression of that power: as in St John's teachings in the Bible – "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God and the word was God". Consequently, misuse of words, especially by an Initiate, is forbidden. And Ted repeated the phrase "forbade it" or "forbid it" ten times in 'Costly Speech' (BL 170 - 1) to suggest the enormity of Sylvia's transgression of this ban.

Sylvia well knew that "riderless words" (as she put it in her poem) could be deadly "axes", and that their power could echo down the years: and it is significant that Ted chose Sylvia's warning poem, 'Words' ('Words' SPCP 270), as the final poem of the first published collection of Ariel poems. Yet she went ahead and published words which she knew might hurt others. The example Sylvia set then, and later in her free use of Ariel's angry voice, demonstrated publicly that unrestrained freedom of speech was allowable, even acceptable. Her Ariel poems were, indeed, a great achievement for her: but they have encouraged others to express themselves with equal, often devastating, freedom. It is understandable, then, that at the end of 'Freedom of Speech', despite all the laughter, Ted and Sylvia, alone, do not smile.

(NB. I am grateful to Neil Spenser and Colin Low for discussing aspects of 'Freedom of Speech' with me. My interpretation of the poem is entirely my own, but Neil's astrological advice on moons and Saturn returns, and Colin's suggestion that the concept of teshuva might be worth investigating, were both invaluable).

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Crowley, The Book of Thoth, p. 110.
2. Crowley, 777, 'Gematria' p. 25.
3. 'Walking Bare' beautifully describes the gem-like purity and the "appointed" status of a newborn soul-spark in its Earthly setting.

4. In the Hebrew Sephir Yetzirah, the enlightened Tzaddik on this Path hunts for fallen sparks, broken vessels, soul-fragments of a failed Divine Creation. When found, these are, metaphorically, 'eaten' by the hunter in order to reconnect them with the Divine Source and in this process the soul of the Tzaddik becomes increasingly conscious of Divinity and increasingly able to reveal it and draw its healing energies into our World. Jesus, the Fisher of Men, was just such a Tzaddik; so, too, were other prophets and saints. But mediation between human and divine is also the role of the Shaman and, traditionally, of the poet.

5. Gifford. T, 'Go Fishing: An Ecocentric or Egocentric Imperative', Lire Ted Hughes (Ed. Moulin) Editions Du Temps, Paris, 1999.

6. Baring and Cashford, The Myth of the Goddess, p.204.

7. Ted discovered his own hunting instincts very early. He wrote about this in Poetry In The Making (Faber, 1969. pp. 15-17) and wrote, too, of his belief that hunting and the writing of a poem are essentially the same activity.

8. Sylvia's journal entries began in Spain on 7 July 1956 and show that by 23 August 1956 the couple were back in Paris.

9. Lorca, F.G. 'Play and the Theory of Duende', Deep Song, New Directions, N.Y., 1980, pp 42-53.

10. 'Fiesta Melons', 'The Goring', 'The Beggars' and 'Spider' (SPCP 46 - 49). Not until July 1958 was Sylvia able to tackle the dark undercurrents of death and birth of which she was aware in Benidorm. In her poems 'Old Ladies Home' and 'The Net Menders' (SPCP 120 - 121), she uses moony imagery of fluent beauty to deal with things which she described in her journal as "closed to me as a poem subject till now". (SPJ 12 July 1958).

11. Images which suggest sexual witchcraft and passions associated with Sylvia's lips as well as their fullness.

12. Hieronymus Bosch (c 1450 - 1516)

13. The note on 'Spider' (SPCP 275) identifies the source of Sylvia's Anansi.

14. Ted discussed the complex subject of morality and killing in detail in an interview with Ekbert Faas in 1971. This interview is reproduced as 'Poetry and Violence' in Winter Pollen pp. 251 - 267, and the beliefs Ted expressed there, offer invaluable insight into the way in which he deals in Birthday Letters with the predatory instincts encountered on the Path of Tzaddi.

15. Sylvia and Ted may have seen Goya's work, too, at the Prado in Madrid. In the

words of one art-critic, Goya “assuredly made beauty out of ugliness and horror” (James, P. Arts Council of Great Britain, Goya exhibition catalogue, London, 1954): and in Goya’s depictions of human folly and perversion in Caprices, Proverbs and, especially, in Disasters of War, that grin of horror and pain is plain on many human faces.

16. Speaking to Ekbert Faas in 1970, Ted described the Shamanic call, its ancient association with poetry, and the special difficulties for poets in our present society of accepting or rejecting that call. UU 206.

17. In Ancient Babylon she was “Lady of Battles”. In Enheduanna’s Prayer (2285-2350 BCE) she is “Queen who rides the Beasts”, but also “Destroyer of Foreign lands” and “All devouring in Your power”. Pritchard, J. The Ancient Near East Vol II , Princeton University Press, 1975.

18. Ted commented on Sylvia’s use of their bad moments as the subject for her poems in a letter to Janet Malcolm, quoted in The Silent Woman, p. 143.

19. In Sylvia’s poem ‘Ariel’ (SPCP 239 - 240), she calls Ariel “God’s lioness”, but the God of the Divine Source is pure, genderless energy which is expressed on the Cabbalistic Tree as ‘male’ or ‘female’ potencies not as gender-defined beings. Cybele, like all gods and goddesses of the Paths, is simply one expression of the energy of the whole.

20. Together, these two grapes, “a black one” followed by “a green one”, complete the winter-summer, night-day, death-rebirth wholeness of the Mother Earth Goddess’s cycles of Nature.

21. In Rome, this feast was know as ‘Hilaria’ (Feast of Joy) but it was also called the ‘Day of Blood’, because in a state of ecstasy and possession men would voluntary emasculate themselves and become Galli, Priests of Cybele. Cybele was imported to Rome from Greece in 204 BCE. Rome curbed the wild celebrations associated with her ‘birthday’ and instituted the Megalesia – seven days of freedom from public and legal duties, filled with processions, games and drama. In Rome, the final day of Megalesia (10 April, until the date was moved closer to the vernal equinox) was officially The Great Mother’s birthday.

22. ‘Poppies in July’ (SPCP 203) and ‘Poppies in October’ (SPCP 240). Both poems were written in 1962.

23. The earliest known description of this disrobing of the Star Goddess is found in ancient Sumerian texts, which tell of Ishtar’s descent into the Land of Darkness ruled by her sister, Ereshkigal, in order to bring back her lover, Tammuz, to the World of Light.

24. Neil Spencer writes that Saturn’s return to our birth-charts between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty “marks a point of reckoning, a crucial stage in our personal

development. Saturn is the planet of limitation, responsibility and earned success, its return represents a time when boundaries are broken and outworn structures abandoned.”, True As The Stars Above, Gollancz, London, 2000. p. 51.

25. For the Ancient Greeks, Aphrodite was the laughter-loving goddess. But the laughter of the gods is always to be feared; and in folklore laughter is often regarded as a challenge to the gods and is, therefore, unlucky.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalMoon cardQoph path
The Path of The Moon – Qoph

Tarot card 18. Tree Path 19.

Joining Sephiroth 10 (Malkuth) and 7 (Netzach).

‘Moonwalk’, ‘Black Coat’, ‘Suttee’, ‘A Picture of Otto’.

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The Path of the Moon joins Netzach (Sephira 7) to Malkuth (Sephira 10) at the very bottom of the Tree. It takes the journeyer far from the Divine Source, into the wholly material world of Malkuth, The Kingdom, where all the accumulated energies of the Tree take fixed form. On this Path, the Moon is at its darkest and little of its reflected light remains to guide the traveller through the waters which are the governing Element here. Pisces, the last sign of the astrological year, rules these waters, and the all-embracing, formlessness of this sign is governed, now, by Mars.

The Goddess associated with Netzach is Venus-Aphrodite, still in her role of Hag, Hecate, ‘Ruler of flux and reflux’, Goddess of Death and Life. But the Goddess of Malkuth is the Inferior Mother, the Moony reflection of the All Mother, Binah, in whom all form is potentially present and who, now, brings about the realization of that potential. In Malkuth, she has a terrible aspect but she is the Indwelling Female Spirit of the Divine in all matter; she is the Soul of the World, the Shekinah, Gaia. The unity of the Divine is expressed through her in material diversity – ‘As above, so below’, in Hermetic terms – but with this separation and fixity comes imbalance¹. Our own fallibility in the discrimination of differences between things also results in misjudgment and error. So,

Malkuth is Maya, the World of Illusion, and it is the World of Shells in which the Divine Spark is present but exiled from the Divine Source: it is a fallen world in which our own Souls lie buried.

Malkuth, however, is the 'Gateway of Resurrection'. It is a place of endings and beginnings: the Moon wanes and waxes and the endless cycles of Nature continue. The Cabbalist's Soul can begin to move from here towards the pure light of the Source: the female and male potencies of the Divine may be reunited in balance and harmony, and wholeness regained, and the Inferior Mother, the Shekinah, may return from exile and become The Bride.

The Hebrew letter of this Path is Qoph, which is variously translated as 'The Back of the Head', 'Monkey' or 'Ape'. In the Sepher Yetzirah, Qoph is associated with the Corporeal Intelligence, the potencies of the cerebellum, the most primitive part of the human brain, the involuntary matrix which we inherit from our earliest ancestors and which co-ordinates all our movements. Through the cerebellum we are linked to our animal origins and, thus, to Nature. Cabbalists believe that the Tzaddi on this Path can find and unearth the buried Divine Spark and reunite it with the Source; that the Soul acting through the cerebellum can restore order to Nature. This for Alchemists too, is the seat of 'Anima', the place where memory and motion are joined, the place where The Golden Chain of Homer links us to Heaven² and where the spirit of the Moon, the imagination, acts as the medium through which Nature's order may be restored. This is the place where, in Ted's words, "those prehistoric feelings and satisfactions" (PIM 76) reside; it is "the dark hole in the head" ('the Thought Fox', THCP 21) where our imagination can make us one with Nature.

The shape of the letter Qoph, combines two letters: Resh (meaning 'Head' or 'Beginning') and Zayin ('sword' or 'Weapon'). In this combined group, Zayin, significantly, is written so that it descends below the line of text, signifying that Qoph takes the journeyer (and the enlightened Tzaddi fishing for Divine Sparks) down into the sunless depths of Malkuth, where the only light is the reflected light of the Moon³.

On the Traditional Tarot card, the mask-like face of a waning moon hangs over a bare landscape onto which Yods of Divine Spirit are falling⁴. Two dog-like creatures (sometimes identified as Anubis and Ap-uat, the Egyptian gods which guide the soul through the underworld) howl at the moon and guard the way to the open skyline. And two towers (like the Pillars of the Sephirothic Tree) stand on the distant horizon on either side of the open way. In the foreground, taking up almost half of the card, is a lake the waters of which, as on the Path of the Star, are the Waters of Life, the Bitter Sea of Binah, and, most importantly for a shamanic poet, the waters of the human subconscious. Dominating these waters, is a crab-like creature with its pincers and legs outstretched. It is a creature native to these waters, a creature with jointed legs, simple eyes, devouring jaws and a protective armour which it sheds as it grows and metamorphoses, so that these waters are littered with shells. It is a creature of nightmares, but it is also a symbol of transformation and rebirth⁵.

Appropriately, in 'Moonwalk' (BL 41 - 43), all of these images, and others drawn from mythology, folklore, religion and poetry, may be glimpsed like brief, illusory reflections or fragmentary shells of some greater whole. 'Moonwalk' is the poem on the Path of the Moon the archetypal World of Atziluth. And in the negative, colourless, moon-landscape of this poem, Sylvia, herself, wears a moon-mask – a “shucked off”, armour-like shell. Her anger is “moon-devil”, disturbed and disturbing anger, and her words are regurgitated bits of that same species of joint-legged creature that we see in the lunar waters of the tarot card.

In 'You Hated Spain' which was the poem in the Atziluthic World on the previous Path, Ted left us with an image of Sylvia as a new-born soul on the edge of the Goddess's waters. On July 23, 1956, whilst still in Spain, Sylvia recorded an incident in her journal which suggests her sudden immersion in these dangerous, shifting, waters of the subconscious, and which seems, also, to be the basis of 'Moonwalk'. From the start of the journal entry, Sylvia writes of the full moon as if it were the cause of the deep, dark, unspecified “wrongness” which possesses her and drives her in anger out onto the hillside. She stares at the moon, talks to the moon, and does not want to go out alone, but she is infected by some “poison” which distorts her perception of Ted and makes her think of smothering, death, murder, “the killing words”, and sickness. So, although Ted accompanies her, they “sit apart” like “strangers”. In this short journal entry, the moon's light changes people, landscapes and, in Sylvia's final sentence, “the world”.

So, too, in Ted's 'Moonwalk' is the world changed. Everything in his weird and witchy moonscape, including judgement determined by the Goddess's dice, is black-and-white, “in negative”, moonlit, ghostly “mimicry”, “dream” or “possession”, and Sylvia is immersed in it. Briefly, she is Coleridge's “Nightmare Life-in-Death” Goddess, who was identified by Ted in 'The Snake in the Oak' as Arnquagassak, “the great malignant female” (WP 429). But unlike Coleridge, who confronts his Goddess - this “Unleavened Self, the Cain within him” (WP 418) – Sylvia becomes the Goddess or is possessed by her. She becomes, too, a “tomb-Egyptian”, Maat perhaps, who is mistress of the Underworld and the female counterpart of Thoth. But she could be any dead Egyptian traversing the Hall of Judgement where the deceased one's words⁶ are weighed on the great Balance and Thoth inscribes his judgement in indecipherable “moon-marks” on his palette. Scales picture

Sylvia's own language, now, is indecipherable, as if she were possessed by religious ecstasy or by “moon-mushroom” hallucinogens. So, Ted, in his poem, resorts to the superstitions, old saws and ancient wisdom of folk-lore, as a sort of primitive, protective ritual: pass off the blame onto the “olive trees” (anciently associated with the supreme magical powers of the god⁷); if the soul appears not to be in the body (a superstition about sleepwalking) don't, whatever you do, wake the sleeper.

When moon-magic, lunacy, or possession prevail, logic is useless, judgement is distorted and any interference may have terrible results. Ted refers to the Biblical story of Abel, and, in Genesis, when Cain was possessed by irrational anger the Lord reasoned with him and Cain “talked with” Abel, but ungoverned emotion prevailed and

Cain killed his brother (Genesis 4: 1-5). When the “voice” of Abel’s blood cried out “from the ground”, betraying Cain’s deed to the Lord, Cain was “cursed from the earth” and became an exile. Heaven and Earth, judgement and sin, all play a part in this puzzling story but who is to blame? “Who’s here?”. The Lord who wields judgement? Sin, which is personified in the Genesis story? Or the Goddess, perhaps, whose Duende energy controlled Cain’s Unleavened Self?

Ted, in ‘Moonwalk’ does not recognize Sylvia in her moon-madness, but “Who’s here?”, repeated twice, calls into question Ted’s own identity, too, if he takes no action and only “humours” or “watches”. And the whole situation is a waking nightmare: terrible as Sylvia’s aspect is, this is not a dream - she is “awake”. So, it seems to Ted that “it’s a question of patience”: that the best thing to do is to wait for the moon-governed flux and reflux of energies to take its course.

In the shells of folklore, myth, Biblical and Apocryphal stories which make up this poem, all understanding is fragmentary, and “Who’s here?” becomes a question which may have many answers. What seems clear, is that everything is controlled by the iron, war-like, Mars-governed, aspect of the Moon. Yet this, too, prompts a question: “What is moon?”.

Artape picture

Ted’s answer to this question calls up yet another image from the stories and pictures to which we turn in our constant search for the Truth about our world⁹, and it is an image which also reflects the meaning of Qoph. An “ape / Being led by the virgin” is shown very clearly in one illustration in Robert Fludd’s *Utriusque cosmi*¹⁰. There, the ‘Ape of Art’ sits on the World, surrounded by the Elements, the Planets, the Stars and Heavenly Bodies. It is held on a chain by ‘Virgin Nature’, ‘The Soul of the World’, who, in turn, is attached by the wrist to a chain that descends from a cloud which conceals the Divine Creator. So, in Neo-Platonic and Alchemical lore, the chain of Divine energy joins Nature to the human ape which dominates our world¹¹, where, because of our pride and our reliance on our rational abilities, we see only imperfect reflections of the Truth. The Ape of Art represents the intellectual and technical abilities we employ to describe and imitate Truth; and The Virgin, Nature, is the medium which links us to, and leads us to, the Divine. Fludd’s image is inscribed with the title “Mirror of all Nature and Symbol of Art”.

Ted accurately describes both ape and virgin as “helpless”. Both are chained to the earth and so must remain in this fallen, imperfect, shadow-world. This is the world of Nature, the Goddess’s world, and, in ‘Moonwalk’, this is her hell and Ted and Sylvia are helplessly immersed in it. Sylvia, in particular, has yet to learn to manage the raw energies in and around her, to smelt and shape its “ore” by her own art into an Ape of Art. But the moon seems to have taken control of her most “seriously” on that night in Spain when she described its “cold, cruel” light invading even the house and “poisoning the knives and forks” (SPJ 23 July 1956).

The first half of ‘Moon walk’ describes Sylvia’s immersion in the dark waters of her own

subconscious, irrational energies. She is possessed by her emotions, operated on by the moon, until the ghostly “X-ray” image which suggests how she might use these energies appears. The second half of the poem describes the slow journey through the darkness which she makes before she achieves some mastery of these energies and her new Poetic Self is born.

Fragments and shadows of reality still abound. Ted is still unable to understand what is going on or who he now accompanies through this moonscape: the stars, astrology, mythology, prehistory – nothing can explain it. He sees Sylvia anew, but as a silent moon-shadow, like a “strange dog”. And he, too, is a shadow-dog, befriending her and accompanying her. The dogs might be those two on the tarot card, ambiguous creatures on the threshold of the Way, or simply creatures attuned to and led by the moon. They might be Anubis and Ap-uat journeying through the Egyptian Underworld. Anubis picture But Sylvia’s eyes, the traditional ‘window of the Soul’, show that she is “in her element” (a phrase which has multiple meanings here): like a legendary sea-monster, alive in the Goddess’s waters – like the “Kraken”, to be precise¹² - Sylvia surfaces from the darkness and takes in a store of images on which she will later feed when she writes about Spain. But these images, too, are distorted fragments, “shards and moults” of Nature. They are parts of a moonscape which is so distorted by Sylvia’s emotions that it becomes like a de Chirico picture: a picture of real things in a strange, silent unreal world¹³.

The poem which most suggests Sylvia’s moon-distorted vision of the world is ‘Departure’ (SPCP 51), in which bitterness sours the beauty of the land, drains, corrodes and brutalizes it, so that only images of ruin and rankness remain. It is a poem which begins with fruitfulness and ends with the shell of a house, shambling goats and “sea-salt”. It is a poem which tells of disgust and expresses disgust. In it, Sylvia took the raw ore of her dark, angry emotions and, with her talent, created “so prettily” an artefact which reflects nature. But, like a “fiesta mask”, Sylvia’s poem was a shield, a protective shell, through which her Unleavened Self, her “daemon”, could safely gaze. Ted’s choice of the word ‘daemon’ is exact¹⁴: what was hidden behind the empty shell of words in Sylvia’s poem, and what Ted still saw when he wrote ‘Moonwalk’, was her ‘Indwelling Spirit’, her ‘genius’. This, then, was the first glimpse of Sylvia’s Poetic Self: the first hint of her Ariel voice.

‘Black Coat’ (BL 102 - 103), on the Path of the Moon in the World of Briah, shows Ted not only on the brink of the Goddess’s waters but also on a spit of land, a natural turning point (like Malkuth on the Sephirothic Tree) where, in Sylvia’s poem (‘Man in Black’, SPCP 119 - 120), his black shape established a “fixed vortex” in the world she had just described, “riveting stones, air / All of it, together”. The scene which both poems describe took place before Ted and Sylvia set off across America, so, ‘Black Coat’ is misplaced in the chronological order of events which persists for most of Birthday Letters, but everything about ‘Black Coat’ fits this particular Path.

In Sylvia’s journal entry for 9 March 1959 (the same day that she recorded her visit to her father’s grave in Winthrop), she described walking by the oceanside and “Ted out at

the end of the bar, in black coat, defining the distance of stones and stones humped out of the sea". Her poem, 'Man in Black', was written at about this time and, on 23 April 1959, she noted its acceptance by the New Yorker, and described it as "the only 'love' poem" [her inverted commas around 'love'] in her planned book, the title of which, at that time, was Full Fathom Five. Sylvia chose this title, which was also the title of one of her poems, not only for "the association with the sea, which is the central metaphor for my childhood, my poems and the artist's subconscious", but also because it related to "my own father- the buried male muse and god-creator risen to be my mate in Ted" (SPJ 11 May 1958).

Clearly, in 1958, Sylvia had already consciously begun to identify Ted with her father. And in April 1959, she suggested that the "dead black", which describes Ted's coat, shoes and person in 'Man in Black', was probably a "transference" from her visit to her father's grave. In Ted's poem, this identification becomes "sharp-edged", and he sees Sylvia's ghostly father, that same ghost which had emerged from the sea and taken shifting form in her poem, 'Full Fathom Five' (SPCP 92-3), merge with his own "blurred see-through" shape¹⁵.

Ted, himself, in the cold, sunless seascape of 'Black Coat', is cut back to the vital spirit within him – to the "quick of the blood". And his "sole memory" (the paronomasia of 'sole' with 'soul' is significant) is of standing on the edge of these Moon-governed waters, trying to be alone and "simply" himself: as if he and the sea were "one big tabula rasa" and the sandspit was a point (like Malkuth on the Tree) from which he could make "a whole new start". In his sole/soul memory, he wears a black coat like a carapace, and all the images he recalls are sharp-edged and two dimensional, like photographic simulacra. But, if inspiration comes (as mystical lore degrees) through the sole of the foot ("pressed to the world rock, flat", as Ted wrote in Adam and the Sacred Nine (THCP 451)), Ted's feet, at this point, were still shod. His "shoe-sole" prints were the "only sign" that he had been there; and he did not enter the waters, merely had a "minimal but satisfying discussion" with them. Ted's use of the word 'discussion' is curious: one does not usually discuss things with the sea. The 'Spiritual Vision' of Malkuth on this Path, however, is 'Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel'¹⁶. And the Holy Guardian Angel is often regarded by Cabbalists as the Divine Spirit or the very essence of Self in each person. So, Ted's "discussion" with the sea suggests his own tentative approach to direct communication with his buried Self. In this poem, he notes that at that time he did not understand what the sea and his own subconscious depths could teach him, but he felt the "therapy" of that moment, and he stored this memory away, like a photograph, "for later".

Certainly, by 1959, Ted had begun to study Hermetic, Cabbalistic and Magical knowledge as a possible source of inspiration for his work. At Yaddo that September, he and Sylvia devised "exercises in meditation and invocation" for this purpose¹⁷. And the magical definition of 'invocation' is "the aspiration to the highest, the purest form of the part of oneself that one wishes to put into action"¹⁸, which is, in other words, communication with one's Holy Guardian Angel. But earlier that year, at the time when Sylvia was exploring her feelings for both her father and Ted with her psychologist, Ruth

Beuscher, Ted was so totally absorbed in his own brief approach to these deep and dangerous waters that he had no idea of the sudden change which had occurred in Sylvia's perception of him: no idea either that he, now, he was not just a "target", but a "decoy" with which to draw the creatures of Sylvia's imagination from the "freezing sea" in which (as her journal entries for March 29 and April 23 show) her writing was still locked.

On this Path where Hecate, Goddess of enchantment and witchcraft, governs a black-and-white world of shells and illusions, the Virtue of Malkuth is 'Discrimination', and this discrimination applies, especially, to distinguishing between the real and the unreal, illusion and Truth. The waters here, too, are Hecate's waters of vision and imagination; and Hecate's world is lit only by the borrowed light of the Moon. Poets in particular, whose chief tools for reaching the Truth are imagination and intuition, must be especially careful to guard against error on this path. Sylvia's error was to take a moment of intuitive second-sight (a "diplopic" vision) as fact and to mistake her imaginary projection of this vision for Truth. From then on, exhibiting the Vice of Malkuth, which is 'Avarice', she clung to that false and hollow version of reality and remained possessed by it, to the extent that it informed not only her work but also her life; and, inevitably, Ted's life, too. Consequently, by the time the couple arrived on this Path again, but in the World of Yetzirah, their perception of the world was already distorted, so their ability to discriminate between myth and Truth, shells and substance, was fatally compromised.

In our fallen world, especially in the deceptive light of the Moon, myths and fables and fragmentary visions should not be taken for Truth. But, just as the Moon reflects the light of the Sun, so our myths and stories frequently reflect a gleam of Truth. The task of the Tzaddi on this path is to strip away all illusion in order to discover whatever Truth or Divine Spark may lie within these deceptive shells, and this requires faith, courage, determination, pain and self-sacrifice.

'suttee'(BL 147 - 149), the poem on this Path in the World of Yetzirah, begins with one myth and ends with another. The first, the myth of the birth of Sylvia's Poetic Self from the self-sacrifice of her first suicide attempt, Ted describes as a religion which required complete devotion, dedication and faith from them both. In 1966, Ted described Sylvia's poetic opus as "chapters in a mythology"¹⁹; and in 1995²⁰, he described "the mythic schema of violent initiation, in which the old self dies and the new self is born" as one which "preoccupied" Sylvia, because her "very survival, depended absolutely" on her being able to "impose" her "creative reinterpretation" of this creation-myth on her own life and work. But this "psychic transformation of self-remaking" was agonizingly hard.

In 'Suttee', the awe, fear, struggle, pain and patience required of both Sylvia and Ted as "night after night" over "weeks, months, years" they struggled for Sylvia's rebirth were real enough, as Sylvia's journal entries constantly attest. Yet Sylvia, as in 'Moonwalk', was in her element – immersed in the creative / destructive waters, happy but fearful. Her "anaesthetic" for the ongoing pain of this birth was the daily, necessary, "busyness" (Ted's choice of spelling is precise) of life. As for all of us, this can dull the senses and

keep us from painful self-examination but its healing effect is illusory: it is no more than a placebo in the painful search for Spirit, wholeness and Truth. Nevertheless, Sylvia persisted in her labour and slowly, as Ted's essay in Thumbscrew documents, she made progress, until in 'Elm', in "an apocalyptic disintegration"²¹ of her old self, her new Poetic Self was born.

Ted, however, did not believe that Sylvia's purpose was wholly self-centred. Another poem, 'Religion' in *Howls and Whispers*, develops the same theme as 'Suttee', but in a different, much harsher way. There, Ted describes Sylvia's obsession as "that mythos" in which she is her "own Church" and her religion is "Love", but the sacrifices she makes are the "sacrificial murder" of her mother and father. Neither Sylvia nor Ted are included in these ritual sacrifices, so the poem does not reflect the shared nature of their Cabbalistic journey in the way that 'Suttee' does. Nevertheless, the energies of Malkuth are an important part of 'Religion', and the way in which Ted used them there, throws light on the sacrifices made in 'Suttee'. Sylvia, in 'Religion', embodied the same Duende energies as does the Tiger in Ted's 'tiger-Psalm', which "blesses with a fang" (THCP 577-8): her ritual, sacrificial murder of "Love" was "flow of passion" from her "real lips", and it was expressed "here on earth" in her "words".

For those who are seriously experimenting with magical techniques of meditation and invocation, as Ted and Sylvia were, the energies of Malkuth are essential, because the imaginative forces generated must be 'earthed' and take physical form²². As with electricity and lightning, forces which are not 'earthed' can accumulate and be potentially dangerous; and mishandling (or faulty magical technique) can give these active potencies devastating power. No wonder, then, that Ted, who was still a novice in this magical art, was unprepared for "the flood" when the birthwaters broke and Sylvia's Ariel voice was finally born. No wonder he was unwittingly "dissolved" in those waters and "engulfed" by them. And Ted's choice of the word 'engulfed' suggests precisely the Cabbalistic spiritual and psychological darkness into which he was inexorably swept, because the newborn was not a child of light and beauty, but "the old child", "the old babe", embodying all the darkest, most primitive and most wrathful energies of the oldest gods²³.

Ted set the old, twelfth-century word 'babe' at the beginning of a line, so that its initial letter is capitalized. This suggests the status of the "newborn" as a little god. But 'babe' also has its ancient roots in 'babble' (meaning 'foolish, incoherent prattle') and in 'baban' (meaning 'old-woman') and in 'baboon'. All of these meanings can be applied to Sylvia's Ariel, that precociously mature, hermaphrodite, devilish-trickster spirit, which Ted described in his note to Sylvia's 'The Hermit at Outermost House' as a "comic goblin" full of "crackling verbal energy", with "a lot" of Sycorax's other child, Caliban, "in it". (SPCP 118 - 119).

In the potential dichotomy of energies on the Cabbalistic Paths, the newborn might have been the hoped for Child of Light whose healing energies, here on this Path, could make Sylvia whole, rend the Veil of Illusion and unite her directly with the Source. But even as the babe was born, Ted, caught in the "warp" (the word suggests distortion as

well as fixed threads) of viscous, sticky birthwaters, heard its cries “refracted, modulating” (both words implying some sort of distortion of the original) from “joy” to “screams”. These were Ariel’s characteristic screams, and Ted associates them, here, with death, with primitive, timeless, eternal mourning, and with all-consuming flames²⁴. This “new myth”, taking its final expression in form as Ariel, was woven around Sylvia’s “own self in flames”, and Ted believed it to be an expression of the “deeper negative pattern”, the “pattern of tragedy which lay like a magnetic field in the very ground of [Sylvia’s] being”²⁵. It was primitive, atavistic and completely beyond Sylvia’s conscious control – a product of Qoph, the ‘Back of the Head’, where lies the most hidden part of our nature, the shadow-self which expresses the old potencies that link us to our earliest ancestors.

In spite of Sylvia’s intellect, her strong will and the various rituals she had learned and practiced in order to control these subconscious energies in her work, she was not adequately prepared. So, she was consumed by this newborn Self: possessed by the screams and the tongues of flame, which became her tongue. And Ted, caught up in this “explosion of screams”, found himself running, not to wash his hands of the situation but to try and save himself from these tongues of flame, her tongue, which attacked him, too.

So, a new myth, a new shell, came to dominate both their worlds and this myth became their new reality. Sylvia, in whom “the poetic genius and the active self, were the same” (as Ted wrote in 1966²⁶), had “none of the usual guards and remote controls to protect herself from her own reality. She lived right in it, especially during the last two years of her life”. And in the new myth of sacrifice in which she now lived, in spite of her tears and her cries for help, everything had become confused. Husband and father were still merged, and Sylvia was both ‘Inferior Mother’ of Ariel and ‘Bride’ of Malkuth’s Kingdom – wedded to her newborn Self and that tongue which found material form in her poems as surely as she was wedded to Ted. Everything – child-bride, husband, father, rage, love – now became fuel for the flames. And Sylvia and Ted, with the birth of this old Babe from the depths of the Moon Goddess’s dangerous seas, were once again exposed to the fierce, destructive, life-threatening judgement of the New World Sun, as they had been earlier when they trod the Path of Death in ‘Badlands’ (BL 82 - 86). Then, they were learning the lessons which should have prepared them for the path of Qoph. But now, being eaten away by the flames which deprived them of “the oxygen” they needed to breathe, it was clear that their learning had been faulty.

Yet, in spite of the chaotic, mythic drama which now consumed them both; in spite of the “dark flames and screams” of Sylvia’s new Ariel voice; in spite of the dark aspect of what Ted called Sylvia’s “almost demonic spirit”²⁷, Ted believed that this birth represented a triumph - a “temporary” triumph, as it turned out, but the completion of Sylvia’s “first, brave attempt” to heal and recreate herself²⁸.

After that birth, Sylvia still, in her work, performed the positive “ritual dance” by which she had always tried “to compel ‘the good things to happen’”²⁹. Her poetic techniques, her artistry, courage and determination, are as clear as ever in her Ariel poems, and

Ted outlined her methods in detail in his essay on the evolution of 'Sheep in Fog' (WP 191 - 211). But, as in this essay, Ted discerned in all her work a double level in which the ecstatic ritual dance and its tragic shadow were both equally real and both equally symbolic³⁰. Yet, even as the Sylvia's shadow-Self grew clearer and Sylvia's ritual and symbolic self-sacrifice became horribly real, the value of all that she created after the birth of Ariel remained.

Sylvia saw her world, Ted later wrote, "in the flame of the ultimate substance and the ultimate depth"³¹. And, as the quotation which Ted chose for Sylvia's tombstone declares:

Even amidst Fierce Flames

The Golden Lotus can be planted.³²

Ted had no doubt about the genius of Sylvia's Ariel tongue. He described her language in the Ariel poems as "charged with terrific heat, pressure and clairvoyant precision", and the poems themselves as looking "like a family of living cells, where nothing can be alien or dead or arbitrary" (WP 161). For him, Sylvia's language – those tongues of flame – was "'Baraka': the flame and the rose folded together": and he saw in the "direct, even plain, speech" which characterized her last work, that she had achieved the "unity" and wholeness in her language and work that she had failed to achieve in her life.

This unity in Sylvia's work was the true birth that occurred on the Path of Qoph, and it was a creation which was, according to Ted, "truly tragic" He applied this phrase, also, to Sylvia herself. Yet even in this phrase, Ted, who was never careless with the written word, suggests something positive. He well knew Aristotle's theory of tragedy, which holds that the truly tragic presents a common human dilemma which can stir powerful and intense emotions in readers or spectators and, so, bring about catharsis and healing. Traditionally, the truly tragic also has an epic and moral dimension: it, like Sylvia's work represents "chapters in a mythology" which tell of the human struggle to reconcile artificial laws that constrain and determine human behaviour with the laws of Nature. Ted believed strongly in the shamanic and magical power of epic myths and poetry, so, given his awareness of the fickle, mercurial and potentially dangerous energies of Ariel, it is unlikely that he would have worked so hard to promote the publication and the understanding of Sylvia's work had he not believed that it did have the cathartic and healing power.

Lucas Myers agrees that there is a cathartic aspect to some of Sylvia's work, and he writes that "Ted saw Sylvia's work as a totality, a discrete and self-contained mythology" (CSBA 103). But he believes that Ted eventually saw only mid-Sahara emptiness at the heart of Sylvia's struggle, and he suggests that rather than finding Sylvia's Ariel poems healing, "most people" are more likely to take them as a "licence for regression and aggression", just as some radical and very vocal feminists have done (CSBA 99 - 100).

Sylvia's poem, 'Daddy' (SPCP 222 - 224), in particular, has certainly functioned in this way. And Ted, when he came to write 'A Picture of Otto' (BL 193), was well aware that

he and Otto Plath had become “tangled” in and by Sylvia’s poems. So, as he reached the Path of the Moon / Qoph in the World of Assiah in his own Cabbalistic journey, writing Birthday Letters, he used all his skill and all the energies of this Path to conjure Otto from the grave, to confront him, and to acknowledge and become reconciled with the figure he now saw to be his own shadow-Self.

In Malkuth, in the World of Assiah, the Cabbalistic quester reaches (symbolically³³) the nadir of their journey. Not only is Malkuth our material world, the fallen world of shells, it is also the threshold of life and death, the entrance to the underworld, the promontory (as it was in ‘Black Coat’) around which swirl the seas of the unconscious in which the disembodied Soul awaits rebirth. These seas fill the gulf “beyond death”, from which Duende energy “oozes” with its healing mana (WP 92-3). And in Malkuth, where the Moon Goddess’s magical powers are strongest, an adept in the use of magical techniques may summon the ghosts of the dead from this gulf. The ‘tunnel’ which connects the two worlds is reached through Qoph, the Back of the Head, the seat of the Anima, and the means of entering this tunnel and of invoking spirits to enter it, is imaginative visualization, at which poets are most adept.

An adept poet can conjure ghostly images in the imagination so vividly that they are almost real, and can capture them in words so skilfully that they come alive in the imagination of others, too. In Lorca’s words “The magical property of a poem is to remain possessed by duende that can baptize in dark water all who look at it”³⁴.

Duende was the dark energy of her shadow-Self which Sylvia captured in her Ariel poems. This was the energy from the gulf which, through the “magical property” of her poems, made Ted’s ghost inseparable from that of her father and will continue to do so for as long as her “words can stir a candle” (the most fragile flicker of light) in the imagination of others. That this should have happened, was something Ted “never dreamed”. But Ted’s use, in his poem, of the words ‘occult’ and ‘guilt’ in connection with this occurrence have at least two possible meanings. Firstly, these words suggest that the occult magical practices of meditation and invocation which he and Sylvia used to bring about the birth of Ariel were more dangerous than Ted knew, and that they were infringing some magical or moral proscription by using them. Secondly, because of the position and the ambiguity of “our”, which connects these two words, there is the suggest of some shared, hidden guilt in Ted and Otto; a shared darkness which Sylvia had intuited and written into her poems, where others also saw it, the lasting consequences of which Ted could never, at that time, have imagined.

What sort of guilt might this be? And why should Ted, in ‘A Picture of Otto’, bring his son’s portrait into this merging of identities, too?

The answer, I think, lies in Sylvia’s poetic portraits of her father; and in ‘Daddy’ in particular. Otto was not the ogre, the Fascist, the devil, the deliberate torturer that Sylvia so angrily attacked in ‘Daddy’. Neither was Ted. But Sylvia endowed both men with all the darkest, most primitive, most destructive attributes of our ‘fallen’ species, and she killed both these demonic figures in her poem like vampires, with a stake through the

heart. In 'Religion', Ted was clear that Sylvia's "inexorable murder" of her father was a religious act, a symbolic "sacrificial murder" which was part of her "mythos", and that this "passion" brought words of blessing here "on earth". So, the killing, the horror and the anger in 'Daddy' all can be seen as Duende, with which Sylvia was attempting to perform a magical, ritual cleansing. In her poetic ritual, she focussed on the shadow-side of human nature, used Otto and Ted as figures to which she could imaginatively attach these shadows and make them real, and then she destroyed them. So, though her poem, Otto and Ted became both symbolic and real figures. Sadly, many readers of Sylvia's poem fail to distinguish the shadow from the truth.

In the photograph which Sylvia used to conjure her father's ghost in 'Daddy', and which Ted later used for the same purpose in 'A Picture of Otto', the double image is beautifully demonstrated. This particular photograph (SPLH 17), taken in 1930, is wonderfully appropriate for both poems and for this particular Path. It is black-and-white, like the Moon-world; it is (as are all photographs) an illusion, a ghostly image, a reflection of light caught on film; and in it, the light and shadow bisect the figure of Otto in such a way as to suggest two very different sides of his character. In the bright, lit half, Otto looks relaxed and amiable: hand in pocket, leg loosely flexed, eye bright, hair softly waved and a half-smile on his lips. Here, is the honey-loving "bee-king"³⁵. The dark half of the image demonstrates Otto's "Prussian backbone", the rigidity which was both his strength and his fatal weakness: leg stiff, arm bent and clamped to his side, a book firmly grasped, hair strictly controlled, and face almost cadaverous and hidden in black shadows. No photograph could better demonstrate the "Lutheran / Minister manque", or the stern, demanding, strong-willed man who favoured and encouraged his daughter and who became her god.

Whether or not Sylvia was exorcising more than her own demons in 'Daddy', Ted understood that the picture of Otto she had drawn was, in a sense, a picture of his own darkest Self. And he believed that such energies, if unacknowledged and, therefore, uncontrolled, were exactly those which find expression in the sort of crimes of which 'Daddy' is accused. This, then, is the occult (hidden) guilt which, since these primitive energies exist in all of us, is 'our' guilt, too³⁶.

Sylvia's religious mythos, as expressed in her Ariel poetry, also included her and Ted's son, Nicholas. In 'Nick and the Candlestick' (SPCP 240 - 242) this is especially evident. Like a "miner", in this poem, she goes back to the Goddess's "old cave" of echoes and Moon-magic, where fish take "communion" out of her toes as if she were the Goddess's High Priestess. And she returns, in the flicker of the candle, with the "embryo" of love, the new-born son, the baby who remembers his "crossed" position, as if remembering the crucifixion from which the blessed god-child of myth and religion was born. This is the child who will "wake to" a pain which is not his. This, finally, is "the one", "the baby in the barn". The religious parallels are obvious.

So, in her religious zeal, Sylvia's son, as well as her husband and her father, became part of her mythology of salvation through sacrifice. Son, Husband and Father, too, were necessary to the Goddess in her aspects Virgin Mother, Wife and Hag. They

established the female-male balance necessary for Sylvia's poetic alchemy to succeed, and as such, each was an essential part of the picture. So, Ted includes his son's portrait in 'A Picture of Otto'.

Sylvia did not have the balance and maturity which is necessary to make pure Alchemical Gold. She did, however, unearth her own shadow-Self. By tunnelling into the underworld of the unconscious, with persistence, determination and courage, she brought Ariel into the light and was both inspired and terrified by this dark spirit which then possessed her.

Ted ends 'A Picture of Otto' with the strong image of Sylvia sleeping, "like Owen" in 'Strange Meeting', with her "German". Wilfred Owen's 'German' was the enemy soldier he had killed on the battlefield, but in Owen's imaginative, poetic vision of the Underworld, Owen meets him again, recognizes him as his own double, and calls him "friend". Similarly, Sylvia's 'German', her 'enemy', was not only the dark, ghostly amalgam Otto-Ted of 'Daddy', but also her own shadow-Self. So, Ted separates her from Otto in his imaginative vision and unites her in harmony with Ariel. He fixes this separation in the words of his poem when he states that he does not see her behind Otto, or in front of Otto where he is standing. And, he magically confirms Sylvia's separation from both himself and Otto, as well as her new wholeness, peacefulness and complete independence, when he sets her image, both in the single final line of the poem and in the final word of his poem, "alone".

There is yet another aspect to 'A Picture of Otto', which has to do with Qoph and with the need to use the energies of Malkuth to earth and give form to the powers summoned in imaginative vision. Ted, like Sylvia and like Owen, creates in his poem a tunnel through which to enter the Underworld. It is in "this tunnel", the passage of black-inked words on the page, that Ted's conjured spirits appear and that Ted continues to meet Otto, talk to him, and acknowledge that the two of them are inseparable. In the deep subconscious Underworld, which was for him, as it was for Sylvia, the "heart's home" he used all his poetic powers to summon the spirits. Now, in both Sylvia's poems and in 'A Picture of Otto' – in the meaning of his words and in the imaginative energies which created them and are now embodied in them – he and Otto "must remain". So, Ted meets his 'German', faces him and greets him as a friend. Between them, now, and permanently secured in the magical, ritual words of Ted's poem³⁷, everything is "forgiven" and everything is "in common". In this poem, and in that part of him which was his heart's home, Ted made a formal and lasting acknowledgment of his shadow-Self. And, because of the deliberate ambiguity of 'you', 'your', 'us', 'our', 'we' throughout the poem, not only are he and Otto separate but inseparable but, in "this underworld", Sylvia too, "must remain". She, too, linked to Ted and Otto in and by the words of the fifth stanza, is part of the mutual forgiveness and the newly established, shared, and all-inclusive harmony which Ted's words, "Everything forgiven and in common", assert.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The concept of the Shekinah as the female potency of the Divine One is contentious but it is part of the Lurianic Cabbalistic myth in which the first separation took place at the moment of Creation. Gersholm Scholem (1897 - 1982) explains this myth in detail in 'Kabbalah and Myth' (On Kabbalah and its Symbolism, Schocken, NY, 1996. pp. 110 - 117) where he deals, too, with "the broken vessels" and with the restoration of the sparks of Soul. Colin Low's essay On Separation is more general in its approach but it offers a valuable and easily understood overview.

2. Robert Fludd (1574-11637) a physician and an alchemist, published a number of influential books in which he explored "the philosophical brain" and the "Ladder of Perfection", the links between Man and the Universe, Heaven and Earth, the senses and the imagination, Reason and inner knowledge. He believed that the basis of all knowledge is the imitation of Nature.

3. The shape of Qoph and the role of the Tzaddi are discussed briefly in The Mystical Significance of Hebrew Letters, but this is an extremely old and complex subject which is regarded by many Jewish scholars as sacred and secret knowledge.

4. Usually, on this card the moon face is framed by a full moon around which rays of sun appear, as in an almost total lunar eclipse of the sun.

5. This creature is sometimes identified with the Sacred Scarab beetle of Egyptian mythology, which rolls the Sun through the Underworld so that it will be reborn each day with the god Keph-Ra.

6. Wallis Budge describes Thoth as "the great god of words" and "judge of words". He notes that in Egyptian texts, the Balance in the Hall of Judgment "is not described as the judging or 'weighing of actions', but as the 'weighing of words'" (The Gods of the Egyptians, Dover Inc. NY 1969, Vol. i. p 408)

7. In folk-tradition, olive besoms are used to drive out evil spirits and olive trees are beaten to ensure that they bear fruit. In mythology, the olive belongs to the great Goddess, to Athena, and to all fertility gods. Hermes invented its cultivation and Medea stirred her magical, rejuvenating, witches brew with it (See Ovid's, Metamorphoses. 7: 345 - 352).

8. In the Authorised Bible, Cain's sons become the first artificers, so, his dark blood is turned to creative ends. In the Apocrypha, there are several different accounts of Cain's murder of Abel. In The Books of Adam and Eve, for example, Eve foresees the murder in a dream; and Earth refuses to accept Abel's body until Adam dies and his body, made of her mud, is also returned to her.

9. Wodwo's question "What am I?" is very like "Who's here?" and both reflect the continuous human concern about our nature and our place in the world.

10. Roob, Alchemy and Mysticism, Taschen, Koln, 1997. p. 501. And Fludd's Utriusque

cosmi.

11. This image of an ape representing human abilities predates Darwin's theory of evolution and the word 'apish', meaning 'foolish' is recorded by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as being in use in 1509.

12. The Kraken is an enormous, legendary sea-monster of Northern European waters. When it surfaces, it is said to give off a pungent smell which attracts shoals of fish, which it catches and stores for future consumption.

13. Giorgio de Chirico (1888 - 1974) was an artist whose work Sylvia knew well enough to discuss in detail with a friend in March 1956 (SPJ 25 March 1956). Two years later, she wrote two poems inspired by paintings by de Chirico which had "seized" her imagination, and she recorded quotations from his writings in her journal (SPJ 29 March 1958).

14. The SOED defines 'daemon' as 'genius', 'attendant spirit' and, in Greek mythology, 'a being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men'. Also, as 'a malignant being of superhuman nature'.

15. 'Full Fathom Five' was the poem in which Ted believed that Sylvia accepted "for the first time... the invitation to her inner world". Hughes, 'Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems', in Newman (Ed.) *The Art of Sylvia Plath*, Faber, London, 1970. p.190. (This article was first published in *Tri Quarterly* (7: 81-8), Fall, 1966).

16. Colin Low, *Notes on Kabbalah*, p. 34.

17. Op. cit., Newman. p. 191.

18. Crowley, *Book of Thoth*, p. 44.

19. Op. cit., Newman. p. 187.

20. Ted Hughes' essay, 'Sylvia Plath: The Bell Jar and Ariel', in *Thumbscrew*, 2 Spring, 1995. p. 4 - 5.

21. Op. cit., 'Sylvia Plath: The Bell Jar and Ariel', *Thumbscrew*. p. 9.

22. Dion Fortune discusses the importance of Malkuth in this respect in *The Mystical Qabalah*, Society of Inner Light, London, 1998 (first published 1935), pp. 263 - 4.

23. These old gods include Hecate, who is goddess of both witchcraft and childbirth; Astarte, goddess of battle; Blue-eyed Sycorax / Cerridwen, the Moon-witch; and the old Biblical God of judgement and retribution.

24. The falling star, thunder, flooding waters, flames and screams, which presage and

accompany this birth in Ted's poem, also carry echoes of the birth of the child to the woman in Revelation (especially Revelation 12: 1-7 and 13-17); and her banishment, like that of the Shekinah, is associated with our divided and fallen world.

25. Op. cit., 'Sylvia Plath: The Bell Jar and Ariel', Thumbscrew, p. 11.

26. Op. cit., Newman. p. 187.

27. Faas. UU 181. The extract from 'Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems' which is included in Faas's book differs from that in the book edited by Newman.

28. Op. cit., Thumbscrew. p. 11.

29. Ibid., p. 11.

30. Ibid., p. 10 - 11.

31. Faas. UU 181 - 2.

32. This is a Taoist maxim from 6 - 4 BC. Quoted by Wu Cheng (c. 1500 - 1580) in The Adventures of Monkey. Ch. 2.

33. The glyph of the Sephirothic Trees generally shows the Worlds one above the other, with the Underworld directly below the World of Assiah. Sometimes the Underworld, the World of Qlipoth, is represented as a mirror reflection of the upper Trees. But Cabbalists believe that the Worlds and the energies are, in fact, all around us.

34. Op. cit., Lorca, Deep Song. p. 50.

35. Aurelia Plath wrote that Otto's love of honey led him, as a young man, to capture and keep wild bees, and this skill "won him the name of Bienenk  ng (bee king) from his contemporaries" (SPLH 9).

36. Ted would not have intended the word 'guilt', in this context, to imply any transgression of civil or moral laws but to suggest, rather, our crime against Nature. Ultimately, it is Nature's laws which govern us, and our guilt is the arrogance and pride which blinds us to this fact. It is exactly this guilt, this "staturing 'I am' ", which Ted described in his early poem 'Egg-head' (THCP 33) and which was his constant, poetic concern.

37. It is interesting to note the numerology of this poem. It is made up of six four-line stanzas plus one final line. $6 \times 4 + 1$. Four is the number of the Elements from which everything in our world is made. Four is the number of Earth and of 'four square' stability. Here, four is magnified six times. Six is the number of the heart, of Venus, of the Lovers. Seven, the total number of stanzas, is the number of completion. One is the

unity from which all manifestation proceeds and this completes the poem.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalSun CardResh path

The Path of The Sun – Resh

Tarot card 19. Tree Path 20.

Joining Sephiroth 8 (Hod) and 9 (Yesod).

‘Drawing’, ‘Portraits’, ‘The Bee God’, ‘Fingers’.

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As is common on the Cabbalistic Tree, this lower Path – The Path of the Sun, Tarot Path 19, Cabbalistic Path 20 – reflects those Paths and Sephiroth above it with which it shares numbers. So, the Hermit who on Path 9 carried the light of the Spirit carefully in his lantern now, on Path 19, releases that light into our world (10, The World, completion). And all that was said about Nature and about the energies of Saturn-Cronus on Path 9 also has immediate, worldly meaning on Path 19.

In accordance with the laws of Nature, night gives way to day, darkness to dawn and, as the Sun rises higher, the Moon-shadows vanish and everything is exposed in clear, bright light. Winter, too, passes as the strengthening Sun brings new life to the Earth. All living things are governed by these laws, ourselves included. All life depends on them. And such is their importance and their mystery, that this continuing cycle of death and rebirth is the central metaphor of all those ‘shells’ of the myth, fable, religious lore, ritual and science which we construct in order to explore and explain our world¹. These are our mirrors of Truth, and each society explains the mysteries in terms which its members can accept and understand.

In the central myth of Cabbalistic cosmology, Malkuth is the material Kingdom in which all created things contain a buried Divine Spark, and it is the task of the enlightened one (the Tzaddi, in particular) to unearth and redeem these Sparks. So now, on this Path of the Sun, the Cabbalistic journeyer must bring all that has been revealed in the deep unconscious seas of the Moon into the clear light of day.

The energies of Hod (Sephira 8) on this Path are the Soul-guiding energies of Mercury,

who now leads the journeyer out of the Lunar Underworld and towards the Spiritual Experience of Hod, which is the 'Vision of Splendour'. 'Truthfulness' is Hod's Virtue. But 'Order' is its Illusion, and 'Rigidity' its Qlippoth: so, pride, pedantry, untruth and trickery may mar Hod's 'Glory' and 'Honour'. The journeyer, here, must be wise to Mercury's nature and must have a clear understanding of their own if their quest is to succeed.

Mercury

The very shape of Hod's number, 8, suggests balance and continuity, as well as the twined serpents of Mercury's magical caduceus, and the double helix of the genetic material which is the foundation of life on Earth. Its bounding line is endless: turned on its side, the figure represents infinity. And just as the Cabbalistic number for this path, 20, represents two complete, connected cycles of the journey, so 8, figuratively joins an upper, spiritual world with a lower, material world in such a way that both are ever-present and the energies of both come together at a single point.

Everything about Hod on this path associates it with the cyclic patterns of Nature and with new beginnings. On the Sephirothic Tree it lies at the base, the foundation, of the Pillar of Form. It is linked to, and must be balanced by the energies of Netzach (7), which transmits the Life Force of Nature and which is the foundation of the Pillar of Force. On this Path, the energies of both Hod and Netzach are joined with those of Yesod (9) which is the Foundation of all that is made manifest through Malkuth (10). Together, Hod, Netzach and Yod make an active triangle on the lower Paths of the Tree which mirrors the Supernal Triangle of Kether (1), Binah (2) and Chokmah (3) at the Tree's apex. So, the All Father, All Mother and their Child (Magus, Empress and Fool) are reflected in our material world; and Hod's Mercurial energies, active in the Sphere of Form, can en-Soul the Life Force of Nature here on Earth. This is the formal magic of Hod, and through its energies the invisible mysteries of Nature (the 'Moon-child' of Venus-Aphrodite) are brought into the light and made visible.

For the Tzaddi, the Magus, the Shamanic poet, and for any inspired artist, Hod's powers on this Path are essential. Not only does the artist stand at the intersection of spiritual and material worlds where Truth may be glimpsed, but Hod enables them to channel that Truth in their work.

The Hebrew letter for this Path, Resh, means 'Head' and 'Beginning'. It, too, is associated with the channelling of Truth into creations here on Earth. It is shaped like a large Yod (which represents the Divine Spirit) and is said to be "pregnant with" the creative force, filled with the "something" in the "created something". This 'something' is totally independent of its human creator, it comes in a moment of clarity and wisdom and is accompanied by awe and the "fear of God". So, Resh resembles the bowed head of the awed human creator or "the mind 'bending over' in order to express itself in speech" or in any other Divinely inspired creation². And this potential for inspired, illuminated creativity is reflected in the Cabbalistic meditation for this Path: "In the Sun is the Secret of Spirit".

For Hod's energies to be positive and healing, however, Form and Force, Male and

Female, Solar and Lunar energies, all must be united in complete balance and harmony. A second meditation, “The Twins shining forth and playing”, represents this necessary balance and the essentially hermaphrodite nature of Hod3.

The twins, a male and a female child dancing in harmony in the light of the Sun, are a prominent feature of the Traditional Tarot card for the Path of the Sun. They dance barefoot on the earth, like innocent infant Souls prepared for enlightenment and wisdom. Above them, is the face of our Earthly Sun, the ‘Lord of the Fire of the World’⁴, with its rays filling half the card. Around them fall nine Yod-shaped drops⁵, which suggest the energies of the nine Sephiroth which are collected by Yesod (9) and channelled into our world through Malkuth (10). And behind them is a wall, carefully built, so that it suggests that the children are either within their own walled, Paradisal garden (like the laughing children in Eliot’s Four Quartets), and/or that they have stepped outside human boundaries – outside the restraints and rules of conventional social order.

The twins on the Traditional Tarot card are not helpless babes. They are not quite naked, and the way their arms wrap around each other suggests their awareness of each other as well as the loving nature of the ties which bind them. They dance in the clear light of that Sun which, symbolically, brings order to chaos by balancing the Lunar, intuitive, emotional elements of human nature with our rational, ordering abilities and, so, allows for the dawning of Wisdom.

All of this symbolism is apparent in ‘Drawing’ (BL 44- 45) which is the Birthday Letters poem on this Path in the Atziluthic World of Archetypes. The young couple in this poem inhabit a sunlit, timeless scene in which they are happy, relaxed and calm, yet busy. Sylvia “doggedly” captures her vision of Benidorm market on her pad: Ted is “scribbling something” (his choice of the word ‘something’, here on this Path of Resh, can hardly be accidental). Like the twins on the Tarot card, they are outside the ‘walls’ of their usual constraints of work, family, friends and society: they are in a new place – honeymooning in a sort of Paradisal garden – and they feel accepted there and free.

In their shared Cabbalistic journey, too, they are no longer the naive ‘Fools’ they were when they set out: the “tourist novelty”, so-to-speak has worn off and, for the moment, they know their “own ways” about this new environment. Sat on steps “in our rope-souls” (as Ted puts it) the young couple share a simple holiday mode of dress. But also, because of Ted’s frequent use of the paronomasia between ‘sole’ and ‘soul’, they share a new, rough connection with the natural world (rope being a natural fibre, and ‘rope’ also meaning ‘catch’ and ‘fasten together’) and, so, with their own Souls.

With time to relax and play, Sylvia made a drawing of the market place in Benidorm (where the couple lived for a few weeks shortly after their marriage in 1956). What she captured was “the portrait / Of a market place that still slept / In the Middle Ages”: something which was close to nature, instinct and necessity, a scene which was centuries old and which would shortly disappear under the transitory, artificial, dazzle and noise of “a million summer migrants”. With determination, Sylvia captured it,

“arresting details” and fixing them permanently on her page⁶; and Ted, too, as he wrote ‘Drawing’, arrested a moment in time and fixed it on his page. Both worked in “contemplative calm”, “concentrated quiet”, and “stillness”. Both, like T.S Eliot, tried to convey, in “the form and pattern” of their work, their own experience of that moment of calm which, like the “still point of the turning world”, is where the “dance” of all the energies “is”⁷.

The form and pattern of Sylvia’s drawings, as Ted wrote in 1965, was “inexorably ordered and powerful” and there was a unity about them in which “nothing” could be “alien or dead or arbitrary”(WP 161). She worked with the sort of care in which “not a line is drawn without intention, & that most discriminate & particular”⁸. And both she and Ted would have agreed with William Blake’s pronouncement that: “As Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant, so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass Insignificant – much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark”⁹. Certainly Ted’s reference to Sylvia’s “poker infernal pen”, in the opening line of his poem, was not (in Blake’s terms) ‘Insignificant’. Her “poker infernal pen” (which sounds like a very odd implement) worked “like a branding iron”: very much as did the “corrosives” which Blake used for “printing in the infernal method” – acids which burned and cauterized, “melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid”¹⁰.

Ted understood Blake’s use of the word ‘infernal’¹¹, with its meaning of ‘place below the Sun’ and its reference to cleansing and purifying Hell-fires. And he recognized that what Blake was doing with his “infernal method” was something which magicians call ‘Drawing down the Sun’. Blake wanted to brand his own visions of eternity and Truth onto his pages as clearly, cleanly and exactly as he could possibly manage. So, he used his pen, his burin and his acids, as a magician would use his wand, or Mercury would use his caduceus, to channel the Divine energies into this world and to give them form. This is what Ted, too, was doing in ‘Drawing’, and what he describes Sylvia as doing in Benidorm. Each was using all their powers, and the ‘Powers’ of poetry and art, to draw down the Sun: to capture a timeless moment so that it might afford others a glimpse of the Infinite.

Palm of Hand

For all Cabbalists, all magicians, and in almost every religion, hands and fingers are the means by which Divine energies are channelled into our world. Michelangelo’s image of God touching fingers with the newly created Adam, is a well-known example of this belief¹². The ‘laying on of hands’ is as much part of formal religion as it is of folk-healing practices. And the use of ritual hand and finger gestures in religions, and by those who wish to attract Divine energies or who believe that they can transmit such energies to others, is widely practiced. With the hands, too, or with special tools held in the hands, the artist can create ‘something’ which is pregnant with those energies.

For Ted, the picture which Sylvia created in Benidorm retained enough of those energies for him to “drink” from them as he wrote his poem¹³. Looking at that picture in another time, another place, and not yet in the “endless darkness” in which Sylvia was held, he found that it conjured in his memory the place, the people, and the feelings of

that time. And memory, like imagination, is an essential part of the human Soul.

Aristotle described imagination as that part of the Soul which creates “portraits” from memories of past experiences and holds them in memory for contemplation¹⁴. This is exactly what Ted did in ‘Drawing’: creating and “Holding this memory” of Sylvia so vividly in his imagination that he shared again the “contemplative calm” which she had “released” in him as she drew. The phrase “contemplative calm” is repeated in the poem in such a way that it links past and present. And, just as Ted “drank” this mood from Sylvia’s “concentrated quiet” then, “now” he “drinks” from her eternal stillness to create this poem.

So, using memory and imagination Ted again entered the “dark adit” between our world and the Underworld of unconsciousness. This time, there was no confrontation, as there was in ‘A Picture of Otto’. Instead, Ted used the form and pattern of this poem to link his hand with Sylvia’s (not just metaphorically in the similarity of their creative endeavours, but also in the words of lines 27 - 30) and to bring her spirit back into the light. In so doing, not only are past and present linked so that Sylvia and he become part of the natural, eternal cycles of change, but Female is linked with Male, Lunar energies with Solar energies, instinct, intuition and emotion with rationality and will, and everything is balanced and in harmony ready for a new beginning. And, by the use of “Now”, in the written and printed words of this poem, Ted joined his own immediate present to that of future readers, so that the pattern became continuous.

In the final two lines of ‘Drawing’, Ted acknowledged and confirmed the continuing and continuous presence of that “stillness” in which Sylvia lies. It is the stillness of death, but also the stillness from which both of them had drawn energy to create that ‘something’ which is the pregnant stillness of Resh: that something which connects us all to the eternal, the seminal, the infinite and ever-present energies which no human can “disturb or escape”, and which are represented in the continuous double circles of the number 8 – the number of Mercury and Hod.

‘Portraits’ (BL 104 - 105) is the poem on this Sun-Resh Path in the World of Briah. Briah is the World of intangible creation, where, ‘something is made out of nothing’ but that ‘something’ is a pattern, an abstract concept, a world-view, a potential form. And Resh, too, is pregnant with creative ‘something’, some vision of Truth, which the Sun may illuminate and which, through the energies of Hod and Yesod may be drawn down into poetry, art and music. All of this creative Alchemy is present in ‘Portraits’. It is a poem full of actual artistic creation – Howard’s, Sylvia’s and Ted’s. But it is pregnant, too, with some energy which defies definition but is seen as a dark shadow, a Blakean ‘smudge’ which emerges from the dark of Howard Rogovin’s painting and fills Ted with “horrible premonition”.

Just as Ted used Sylvia’s drawing of Benidorm on that day in 1956 to symbolize one new beginning, one new dawning of light in their shared poetic quest, so in ‘Portraits’ he used a painting by American artist Howard Rogovin¹⁵ to mark the start of another.

Sylvia and Ted met Howard Rogovin at the artists' colony of Yaddo in Autumn 1959, and it was here (apparently) that Howard painted Sylvia's "portrait". Ted's own poetic portrait of Howard is that of an artist inspired by "spirits", an Alchemist at his "crucible", alight with and lit by the work he is doing. The "Yaddo fall", the evocative Autumnal smells and rain and echoes of "Tribal conflict", melt into the rainbow colours of Howard's fiery "oils", and Sylvia's image emerges like a "new-fired idol" from his cauldron. His "tripod" could be his easel, but it could also be the ritual vessel of the Alchemist or magician, the three-legged stool of a seer, or the three 'legs' of the Sun (rising, zenith and setting)¹⁶. Alchemical Sulphur broods in the Autumn mood, the shadows and in the dark suggestion of "evil". But Mercurial magic, too, is there in abundance in Howard's creation, in Ted's portraits of both Howard and Sylvia at work, in his evocation of the "vital", "beautiful", "tentative" snake, and in Sylvia's own poem 'Medallion' (SPCP 124 - 125), where Ted sees the bronze snake's "dead immortal" shadow-double enshrined.

It is the Mercurial snake which brings all the energies of this poem together. Linked in Ted's lines to the dark threat behind Sylvia's image, it swims into Ted's poem and the flicker of its united-yet-divided "bronze prong" suggests its double nature. It embodies life and death, beauty and horror, Truth ("Snakes are snakes") and illusion ("It's evil"). It is magnetic, "hypnotic", thrilling, inspiring and entrancing. But its Sulphurous poisons, its sinuous life and its deadly magnetic attraction are blocked, suddenly, by the word "Beautiful", and so it becomes first a creature of evil, then the inspiration for Sylvia's poem, and finally, the enshrined idol of its dead double.

This pattern mirrors Sylvia's creative struggle whilst she was at Yaddo, the pains which drove her, the nightmares which haunted her, and the inspiration she drew from Nature's beauty and was suddenly able to express directly in her poems, working as if "entranced", and using her thumb and fingers to untangle "a music" that only she could hear. She gave this music form in 'Medallion', a poem which she thought of as "a good poem" (SPJ 25 Sept. 1959), one which she was "sure of" (SPJ 29 Dec. 1959). And, towards the end of their stay at Yaddo, and in spite of the dreams and the "Menacing gods" which still haunted her (SPJ 13 Oct. 1959), this new music flowed into a sequence of seven poems which she called 'Poem for a Birthday' (SPCP 131 - 137).

Sylvia described these seven poems as "a fine new thing" (SPJ 23 Oct. 1959), very different to anything she had done before, but she was puzzled by them. She found them "moving, interesting" but could not decide "how deep" they were (SPJ 1 Nov. 1959). She certainly did not recognize that they foreshadowed the emergence of her own dark shadow-Self, her doppelgänger, Ariel, even though she structured them as a poetic rebirth. Nor did she hear in her new, direct voice what Ted later described as "the voice of Ariel... clearing its throat"¹⁷. But these Yaddo poems, and 'Poem for a Birthday', in particular, did mark an important new beginning for Sylvia. She had moved away from the tyranny of the Thesaurus and the Dictionary. And, in 'The Stones', she spoke in direct, simple language of a "quarry of silences" in which, with "Love", she shaped with her "Ten fingers" a poetic vessel for "the elusive rose" which was her new Soul of "shadows". So, Howard's portrait had, indeed, revealed a glimpse of Truth: and, as Ted's intuition told him, it was sinisterly prophetic.

'the Bee God' (BL 150 - 152), which is the poem on this Path in the World of Yetzirah where the abstract patterns created in Briah crystallize out, is crucial in Ted's explanation of this sinister shadow. With the additional creative energies of Resh and Hod which exist on this particular Path, the creation of Form is trebly confirmed and the shadow which was prefigured in Howard's painting now takes Mercurial shape in the light of the Sun. Thus exposed, like everything else on this Path including the Cabbalist, it will be tested to the limit and every weakness, imbalance and lack of wisdom and maturity will be revealed.

Bees are instinctive creators of order and form; and they are Mercurial creatures, full of mercurial energy in their flight and their dancing, and double in their nature, having both stings and honey. They carry the messages of the gods; and at Delphi, oracular Bee-priestesses served both Apollo and the Earth Goddess. Bees are one of the most ancient symbols of the Goddess, and the noise of their swarming is the sound of her Creation. So, they represent her in many of her forms, but especially as Mother Goddess, Astarte, Cybele, Demeter, Aphrodite and Hecate – the Queen Bee whose dark Moon is the Moon of Generation. The bee-swarm, however, also carries the Sky-God, Jupiter's thunder, and the honey which his bees make (food of Hermes-Mercury, Dionysus and (notably) Shakespear's Ariel) was the downfall of Saturn-Cronus: intoxicated by the sweet, sensual pleasure of it, he was overthrown by Jupiter and castrated. Neo-Platonists and Hermeticists, too, associated honey with sensual and sexual pleasure, believing that its sweetness draws the Soul down into our fallen World of Generation and keeps it here¹⁸.

In the Orphic Mysteries and in the myths which deal with Nature's regenerative cycles, bees and honey played an important role, and Father-Husband-Son, Mother-Wife-Daughter, each was closely associated with them. At Midsummer, the clash of the Great Earth Mother's cymbals causes the bees to swarm for her nuptial flight, and after the Queen Bee's mating her Sun-King is emasculated, killed and deposed to ensure the renewal of fertility in her Earthly hive. Cronus-Saturn, drunk on the honey brought to him by Jupiter's bees, was emasculated for just this regenerative purpose. And in English country lore, whilst "a swarm of bees in May" is said to "bring a load of hay" and thus foretells a good harvest, May was also the time of May-Eve witch rituals which required the emasculation or death of the Sacred King (WG 404 - 405).

As is usual in Birthday Letters, 'The Bee God' describes actual events in Ted's and Sylvia's lives, but the mythological, astrological and Cabbalistic associations of the images he chose give the poem an additional, deeper meaning.

In June 1962, Ted and Sylvia became beekeepers. In 'The Bee God', it is "summer" and "Maytime", the Goddess's time in England¹⁹, and Sylvia's detailed word-picture of her first attendance at a beekeeper's meeting was written on the 7th June ('CHARLIE POLLARD & The Beekeepers' [sic.], SPJ 7 June 1962). The following day she described a visit to Charlie Pollard's home and the collection of an old wooden hive which she would clean and paint ready for her bees. And on 15 June, close to the

summer solstice, she excitedly wrote to tell her mother that she and Ted had “become beekeepers” [sic.], (SPLH 15 June 1962). In that letter, Sylvia described the beekeepers’ meeting, the transfer of bees to her own hive, and how it happened that Ted “flew off with half-a-dozen stings”. All of these descriptions became part of the five bee poems which Sylvia completed between the 3rd and the 9th of October that year. In these poems, she wove her bee-keeping experiences into her own mythos and as she did so she created a new and dangerous chapter in her own ‘religion’.

Early in 1959, Sylvia had written ‘The Beekeeper’s Daughter’ (SPCP 118) where, in a poem full of the luxuriousness of nature, she moved from being a stone under the foot of the “maestro of the bees” to being the queen bee of the wintering “Father, bridegroom”. Sylvia may have engineered this ‘marriage’ within her poem, but the Father throughout the poem is in charge. In her five bee poems of October 1962, however (SPCP 211 - 219), Sylvia begins as “the magician’s girl” but becomes “sweet God”, a woman “in control” of her own destiny. ‘Stings’, in particular, is a statement of independence, where she determines to recover her “self” and is reborn as a “terrible” and terrifying lion queen²⁰, whose workers have made a “third person” a “great scapegoat” (Ted, in reality was the one who was stung), so that “now he is gone”. And in her final bee poem, ‘Wintering’, she and her bees, “all women”, are “flying” into a new Spring.

The ‘voice’ in Sylvia’s bee sequence is her Ariel voice: strong, clear, independent and determined. She is united with her shadow Self and, in these poems, she holds the power and a certain balance and harmony prevail (which is, perhaps, why she chose to end her Ariel book with them (WP 167)). Her tone is matter-of-fact and there is a gentleness in her acknowledgment of the un-named scapegoat and of the “sweat of his effort” which had been the fertilizing “rain” of their world. “He was sweet”, but now she had her own “honey-machine”. She recognized that she was in a new place, in her life and in her poetry, and that it was a scary place of “decay” and “possession”: but she was careful to balance the black “mass”, the blackness of “Mind”, with the long “smile” of white snow in ‘Wintering’. And, from the cold, the stillness, the pregnant “bulb” (a word which suggests stored natural energies as well as contained light), she magically evoked the regeneration of Spring.

So, from the cyclical, natural pattern of fertility in a beehive, Sylvia created a metaphor for the emergence of her own Bee Queen persona. But there were actual events, too, which were built into her poem and, sadly, the balance she achieved in ‘Wintering’ was a moment of calm which did not last.

In ‘The Bee God’, Ted was writing in the context of this Path and with the benefit of hindsight, and he saw things rather differently. He saw that the Mercurial, magical energies of Hod had connected Sylvia directly to the Otherworld. Figuratively, she had stood for a moment at the still point where the two circles of the Mercurial figure 8 touch – the place where all the energies of the two worlds meet. He saw that in the actual, worldly rituals of bee-keeping she was working with the Yesodic energies of Nature; and in the imaginative world of her bee poems she had opened the dark tunnel, the “well” to

the unconscious, and that by giving it form in the poem she had ‘married’ Earthly and Spiritual energies together in such a way that Otherworld energies could “come up” out of that well. In a letter to two German translators²¹ of this poem, Ted noted Sylvia’s linking of these worlds of Form and Spirit when he described her page as a “seething mass and deep compound ball of living ideas—carrying, somewhere in the heart of it... the ‘vital nu-clei’ [sic.] of her poetic operation—her self and her Daddy—and finally, her poem”.

Bowed over her bees in their hive and over the “dark swarm” of bees and words on her page, Sylvia (like the curved, pregnant shape of Resh) created ‘something’: honey from the hive; and the eloquent, intoxication, purifying honey of the words which blossomed on her page, not just in the bee poems but in ‘Daddy’, too. And in Ted’s poem, the double nature of the mercurial bees and their honey is apparent. Sylvia, bowing her “slender neck”, is also bowing to whatever sacrifices this new situation would require of her: bowing to the “weighing” at the heart of it all – the judgement which, in her own mythos of sacrifice and rebirth, must inevitably take place.

This time, too, in her bee poems and in her life, was “Maytime”, time for the rituals which, in the Orphic Mysteries, would ensure rebirth and new fertility: time for the King-Father-Lover to be deposed, killed, or driven off and rendered impotent. And, perhaps, all this had to be achieved before her thirtieth birthday on October 27th, when Saturn returned to her birth-chart and, astrologically, she would be ‘reborn’.

Chestnut Flower

This astrological connection with Sylvia’s ‘Saturn Return’ and a rebirth is not fanciful or insignificant. “Daddy”, in Ted’s poem, is far more than just the dark idol Sylvia made of her dead father. He is the old Father God – Jupiter (Thor, Zeus), Sky God, Creator of Form, Wielder of justice and retribution and, as guardian for the Earth’s fertility, he is the Bee God²² who sent his bees to intoxicate Saturn-Cronus with their honey. The “hot shivering chestnuts” of Jupiter’s royal tree hang their “lit blossom” in the orchard²³. And his bees – a “thunderhead” of new souls – are mercurial messengers which belong, too, to Sylvia: they tend her lion-like “golden mane”, like words buzzing around her head²⁴. His “orders” are “geometric”, governed by strict laws of proportion and distance and shape. And his “plans” (‘orders’ and ‘plans’ both have structural connotations) are “Prussian”, which as well as referring to Otto Plath’s German origins also suggests rigidity, and the deep Prussian Blue (astrologically Jupiter’s colour) of Jupiter’s thunderous sky.

As Sylvia gazes into Jupiter’s “cave of thunder”, the first of the bees, like an “outrider” from Jupiter’s court, stings Ted and sets him running like a “jackrabbit”, through a “sunlit” hazard of bee-bourn “volts” and lightnings. Ted is the “target”. He runs like the hunted hare in the May-Eve love-chase of the Sacred King (WG 402 - 405), but it is the bees which are “disembowelled” as they sting him: the hunters, not the hunted, who die. His punishment, however, is not over.

Ted sees Sylvia’s chaos of emotions; sees the conflict of “dream-time” and reality in her;

sees in her face and in her actions her attempts to rescue him. But Jupiter's will is implacable and this chain of events, like the cycles of Nature, is now beyond human control.

Neat as this parallel is between the actual incident in which Ted was stung and the Orphic and May-Eve fertility rituals and myths, there is yet another, much more serious level to these poems. For both Sylvia and Ted, imagination was the 'heart's home' and poetry was their way of trying to make their lives make sense. Between May and October 1962, their marriage was in crisis, and the turmoil of emotions which Ted describes seeing in Sylvia in 'The Bee God' was very real for both of them.

In early May, David and Assia Wevill had spent a weekend with Sylvia and Ted at Court Green. Shortly after June 15th, when Sylvia had become a beekeeper (the hive was hers), Aurelia Plath arrived to stay. But in July, Sylvia intercepted a phone call from Assia to Ted²⁵ and Aurelia moved out of the house, because, as she wrote later: "the marriage was seriously troubled…... Ted had been seeing someone else and Sylvia's jealousy was very intense"(SPLH 17 Aug. 1962). Some time before the 4th of August, Sylvia made a ritual bonfire of some of Ted's letters and papers²⁶. And on 27 August, she wrote to her mother that she planned to get "a legal separation from Ted" (SPLH 27 Aug. 1962). In September, she and Ted spent a few days together in Ireland, but on 9 October she wrote "I am getting a divorce". She did not do so, but Ted recorded in his editorial notes to Sylvia's Collected Poems: "She and her husband separated in October"²⁷.

Sylvia, in her bee sequence poems, asserted her independence and power. They are dated 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 October. 'Daddy' (SPCP 222 - 224); her poetic exorcism of her Daddy / husband is dated 12 October. And 'The Jailer' (SPCP 226 - 7), in which in her fever she dreams of "someone" (who, from the veiled allusions is clearly Ted) and imagines him "impotent as distant thunder", is dated 17 October. In all of these poems, Sylvia made the crisis in her marriage part of her personal mythos of love, sacrifice, death and rebirth: but the words she collected like honey were often "axes".

It is this punishing power of words which colours the last part of 'The Bee God'. This poem is part of Ted's own poetic attempt in Birthday Letters to make sense of everything that happened to them, and it suggests that when exposed to the fierce light of the Sun on this Path, Sylvia's Cabbalistic preparation, in spite of her newfound powers, was not yet adequate for the task she had set herself. For many reasons, when exposed to the test, the necessary balance between Love and Will which is part of the wisdom needed at this stage of the journey, was found to be disturbed. And the test to which Sylvia was exposed was very much part of Hod's Mercurial, sexual, snake energies, and of the dark, jealous, Moon energies of Yesod, which are represented on this Path by Lilith.

Tested by sexual jealousy, all the energies of the Cabbalist on this Path swing between extremes: Love and Anger; Mercy and Retribution; Instinct and Reason; Female and Male. For the Cabbalistic journeyer, the result is a personal chaos to which only the truly

wise and mature can restore order and harmony. The need to 'know thyself', and to have the strength to resist outside pressures, is vital. Sylvia, in this situation, swung between extremes; and although she asserted her independence in her poems, she still allowed the opinions and the words of others to influence her. These words, too, were the stings of the Bee God's "fanatical helpers" which came to torment Ted, even as he thought he had removed himself to a safe place. And Ted's poem, 'Howls and Whispers' (THCP 1178 - 1179) 28, which deals with that same few months of 1962, repeats some of these words and describes their effect on him and on Sylvia.

The "lone bee" that flew in to attack Ted in 'The Bee God' was, almost certainly, Aurelia Plath on her visit to Court Green²⁹. In 'Howls and Whispers', Ted makes it clear that he believed that Aurelia had never forgiven him for having "aborted" and "annulled" the plans she had once had for Sylvia's career and marriage. He quotes from some of Aurelia's letters to her daughter: "Hit him in the purse", "go straight for divorce", "keep him out of your bed"; and he imagines her "joy" that Sylvia was "ridding" herself of him. The "helpers", on whom Aurelia called when Sylvia announced that she and Ted were separating, also wrote letters full of stinging words, letters which Sylvia "waved" in Ted's face like "War-banners"³⁰.

'Howls and Whispers' is an angry poem, a howl of pain which lacks the control and the mythological distancing of events which Ted achieved in 'The Bee God', but in both poems Jupiter's retributive energies, wielded by worldly agents, are deadly to Sylvia. In 'Howls and Whispers', Jupiter's "Thunderheads", his electrical "circuits", "transformers" and "voltage" do their deadly work: and in 'The Bee God', he is, finally, the God whose fanatical helpers are "as deaf" to Sylvia's pleas as are "the fixed stars" in the depths of the Goddess's well.

Under Jupiter's sway, Sylvia's own judgemental and retributive energies outweighed her love and wisdom; and her words, in her poems and in *The Bell Jar*, became the axes which she described 'Words' (SPCP 270). So, in the final lines of 'the Bee God', Ted makes reference to Sylvia's 'Words' and picks up images from it so that the 'fixed stars', that aspect of Jupiter's celestial geometry which is seen reflected in the Earth Goddess's dark waters, come to "Govern a life"³¹. Had Sylvia been able to balance Jupiter's controlling powers with the Earth-Goddess's fertile love at that time, the outcome might not have been so determined.

Mudras signs

'Fingers' (BL 194), on the Sun-Resh Path in the World of Assiah, is about the energies which survive an individual after death. Again, the 'portrait' which Ted draws is a product of memory and imagination but, in describing the channelling power of Sylvia's hands and fingers, Ted also draws down the Mercurial energies into his own poem and uses them to magically bestow Sylvia's powers on her daughter. His picture is of sunny, childlike playing; of birds' exotic, sexual display in a "tropical" sun-filled garden; of "lightning" flashes, "infant spirit", "puckish" games, jokes, gymnastics and mime. Sylvia's gestures, like the glittering light in her eyes (which so often in Birthday Letters associates her with the Goddess), are unconscious. Her hands and fingers perform a

“routine of their own”, think “their own thoughts”, behave as if “possessed”.

All of this imagery is appropriate to this Path. And the channelling of energies which Ted describes in ‘Fingers’ is something most of us can do. Like children learning to walk, we master certain mechanical skills which become so automatic that it is as if parts of our body (hand and fingers especially) were merely “conductors” through which energy flows without any conscious, rational control. We play the piano, drive cars, type, and our mechanical “expertise”, like Sylvia’s, is expressed in “deft practical touches” made with automatic ease and accuracy.

Sylvia had learned to play the piano as a child and had found that playing calmed her (SPJ 1 Aug. 1951, entry 102). She recognized, too, the combination of automatic skill, instinct and pleasure which it gave her, when she wished for a life that included “banging and banging an affirmation of life out on pianos and ski slopes and in bed in bed in bed” (SPJ 6 March 1956).

‘Fingers’ evokes these Mercurial, life-affirming energies and it describes Sylvia’s calm as, with her will completely suspended, the energies flow through her fingers completely naturally and with a free and generous excess of feeling. It is this automatic “expertise” and the free-flowing energies – not the will-dominated, dogged control of the “poker infernal pen” – which Ted bequeaths, when he carefully (three times) joins Sylvia’s fingers with those of her daughter in the final five lines of the poem³².

Neither Sylvia, nor Frieda are named in these final five lines³³. And since Frieda was both Sylvia’s and Ted’s daughter it might seem odd that he should have chosen to call her your rather than our daughter. Yet, by using ‘your’, as he has done so often in Birthday Letters to connect Sylvia with the Goddess, Ted creates a geometry in the final lines by which fingers join the world of the gods with our world. He and Sylvia and Frieda, un-named and represented only by pronouns, become Father, Mother, Child, the worldly triangle of the lower Tree which reflects the Supernal triangle at the Tree’s apex. And “your daughter”, who is now both Sylvia’s daughter and the Goddess’s daughter, takes over Sylvia’s role of priestess – using her own fingers to serve, “obey and honour”. Protected by the Lares and Penates³⁴ in the final, sealing line of the poem, “your daughter” now channels the quintessential, life affirming energies into our world: and, again, the ambiguity of the pronoun in “our house” allows for a double meaning.

The Lares and Penates in the final line of this poem, however, are not just protectors of our house, they are also the fingers – Her’s, yours and your daughter’s – which channel the Divine energies into our world. And fingers are the family inheritance, bequeathed by Nature, through which Resh’s pregnant potential may continue to be expressed. The ability to do this is universal, but skill and expertise must be sought and learned before it can be practiced, and very few, even once expertise is mastered, will learn the qualities which are necessary in order to channel the Divine energies into Duende-inspired art.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Joseph Campbell, in *The Masks of God*, traced this metaphor in the belief systems of many cultures and over many centuries and he noted the common human need to construct an explanatory cosmology in which the mysteries, “the invisible things of God”, are made visible and are “reconciled” with “contemporary consciousness” (MOG 4, 613).
2. Reish, *The Mystical Significance of Hebrew Letters*.
3. Crowley, 777, p. 41.
4. This is the Tarot title for this card. Ibid. p.34.
5. The number of these drops varies, but on the Traditional card there are nine, which are coloured blue, like water drops which catch the sunlight and are essential for fertility.
6. Sylvia captured this scene in words, too, in her journal. (SPJ 26 Aug. 1956, ‘Sketches of a Spanish Summer’). Her words and sketches were later published in *The Christian Science Monitor* Nos. 5 and 6, Nov. 1956 (SPJ Editor’s note 261).
7. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, ‘Burnt Norton’, lines 137 - 143 and 62 - 67.
8. William Blake’s notes to his vision of ‘The Last Judgement’. *Plowman* (Ed.) William Blake: *Poems and Prophecies*, Dent, London, 1970. p.364.
9. Ibid. p. 362.
10. Blake, Op. cit. ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’, p. 49.
11. Ted used Blake’s etchings for *The Book of Job* as inspiration for the “Alchemical Cave Drama” of *Cave Birds* and he was very familiar with Blake’s Alchemical and Cabbalistic ideas and methods. I examine this in detail in *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest*.
12. This image can still be seen on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.
13. Sylvia’s drawing still exists, although the scene which she captured eventually “disappeared / Under” surface changes, and Sylvia, too “went under” into her grave.
14. Ted’s beliefs about memory and imagination incorporated much of the Neo-Platonic teaching which derived from Aristotle. Frances Yates briefly outlined Aristotle’s views on this subject in *The Art of Memory*, Pimlico, London, 1992. pp. 46 - 47.
15. Howard Rogovin (1927 -). American artist. Emeritus Professor of Art and Art History, University of Iowa.

16. These three legs are symbolized in Thor's hammer and in the three-legged swastika, which represents the Sun's continuous circling and its power in the cycles of Nature.
17. Hughes, 'Sylvia Plath: The Bell Jar and Ariel', *Thumbscrew* 2, Spring 1995, p. 2.
18. Platonists and Neo-Platonists believed that the Soul was drawn down by the intoxicating ecstasy of sensual and sexual pleasures. Thomas Taylor, Platonist and scholar of the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries, described most of these mythological associations in his essay on 'Porphyry's Cave of the Nymphs'. Raine & Harper (Eds.), *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1969, pp. 305 - 308.
19. The May flower, the Hawthorn, blooms throughout May and June.
20. The lion is the hunting form of the ancient Mother Goddess, Innana-Astarte. It is also associated in myth and religion with bees and with regeneration, as in Samson's Biblical riddle.
21. A copy of Ted's letter to 'Andrea and Robert' (dated 16 June 1998) is amongst the Sagar / Hughes correspondence in the British Library.
22. Sylvia's father was known as the "bee king", as if he were the Earthly representative of the Jupiter's bee-powers.
23. In Magic and Herbal lore the Horse Chestnut is placed under the Dominion of both Jupiter (for provoking abundance and nourishment) and Venus (for provoking lust). In 'Autumn Nature Notes', Ted wrote of the "May lamps" of this "royal tree", (SS 46). Its fruit afforded him a "peek" into the "well-shaft": and the well-shaft and the stars also occur at the end of 'The Bee God'.
24. And like new life buzzing around the Biblical Samson's lion-carcass.
25. In 'Words, heard by accident, over the phone' (SPCP 202 - 203), Sylvia described her reaction to this. The poem is dated 11 July 1962.
26. She described this in 'Burning the Letters' (SPCP 204).
27. These are the raw facts. No-one but Sylvia and Ted can know what really happened between them at that time, and given the turmoil of emotions which inevitably accompanies such a personal crisis, it is likely that even they did not fully understand all that occurred.
28. This poem deals with events between October 1962 and February 1963. Its title on the publishing proof was 'Cries and Whispers' but 'Cries' was crossed through and 'Howls' substituted. It was first published in the Limited Edition of *Howls and Whispers* (a title in which a similar substitution was made at proof stage) in 1998.

29. Aurelia's name carries echoes of the Sky-God's atmospheric lightnings. And the "blind arrow" of the "lone bee" resembles a Medusa's nematocyst barb. Sylvia, in her poetic exorcism of her mother, 'Medusa' (SPCP 224 - 226), sought to throw off the "eely tentacle" which, in jellyfish, is made sticky and deadly by just such barbs.

30. From Sylvia's letters and Aurelia's notes in SPLH between 27 August and 4 Feb. 1963, it is clear that some of these helpers and advisers were Sylvia's brother and his wife, her Aunt Dot, Olive Higgins Prouty (who had been Sylvia's mentor since Smith College), and Sylvia's psychiatrist, Ruth Beuscher.

31. 'fixed stars / Govern a life' [sic.] is a phrase which occurs in identical form in Sylvia's poem 'Words' (SPCP 270) and in Ted's poem 'A Dream' (BL 118 - 119) but it does not mean that life is fully determined by the stars. The influence of the stars, ever-present in our world, creates the patterns of energy to which we, as individuals, will react. How we react, however, depends on our own free will and on the strength or weakness of the Spirit within us.

32. Frieda Hughes is, in fact, a practicing artist and poet.

33. The numerology of this poem combines 8 and 5, both Mercurial numbers. Mercury is the fifth Alchemical planet and 5 represents the quintessence: 5 also represents the spirit resurrected from the tomb of matter, and so signifies a new beginning. The poem begins with 17 lines ($1 + 7 = 8$) and ends with two stanzas of 5 lines – twin stanzas which sit above each other on the page like the two worlds of the figure 8, linked by a light-filled, wordless moment. These two stanzas also suggest the five fingers of two hands.

34. Lares and Penates are amongst the earliest representatives of the gods in our world. Their images used to be placed at the threshold and above the hearth of the family home, where they were regularly acknowledged as mediators between the family and the gods, and as protectors of the gods' gifts to the family of fire, food, and shelter. They are guardians of the order and continuity of family life.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalJudment CardShin path

The Path of Judgment – Shin

Tarot card 20. Tree Path 21.

Joining Sephiroth 8 (Hod) and 10 (Malkuth).

‘Fever’, ‘Stubbing Wharfe’, ‘Being Christlike’, ‘The Dogs Are Eating Your Mother’.

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The Path of Judgment joins the Mercurial energies of Hod (8 – Glory) to the energies of Malkuth (10 – Kingdom), the Sephira which is also known as ‘The Inferior Mother and Bride’, ‘The Gate of Death’ and ‘The Gate of Eden’. Now, the naked children who were joined in harmony on the Path of the Sun may give birth to a ‘Spiritual Child’, thus completing the Earthly pattern which reflects the transformative power of the Supernal Triangle at the apex of the Tree. To do this, the journeyer must be immersed again in the Motherly element of Malkuth, which is Earth. This immersion is known in Cabbala as the ‘second death’.

In Cabbala, it is said that the journeyer must die twice and be reborn three times before the Spiritual goal can be achieved. The first ‘death’ is that of the Fool who begins the Cabbalistic journey: and the ‘second birth’ is that of the Initiate in whom the glow of a Divine Spark has been revealed. This Spark, however, still requires long and careful nurturing before it can grow into a pure, strong flame. Only on the Path of Judgment, as the Initiate nears the end of the Cabbalistic journey, is that embodied Spirit likely to be pure enough and strong enough to be exposed to the Divine Fire which is the Governing Element of this Path. At this stage, the Spiritual flame of the Initiate will be subjected to some fierce external assay. Bodily, material qualities, which (like Mother and Father) nurtured the Spirit with Love and shaped it with Reason, will be stripped away so that the timeless, universal, healing powers of a ‘Spiritual Child’ may be revealed.

For the Cabbalist, as for the Alchemist, the Spirit exists in the body like the hidden power of fire within a coal. This fire may be lit by energies, such as love, which link it to the Divine Source. And, just as fire creates change within a coal and the coal feeds the fire, so, once touched by Divine energies, the process of change within the embodied Spirit is inevitable. The interdependence between fire and coal is necessary, but the changes which take place are unpredictable, because they depend not only on the purity of the coal but on outside factors, too. As the Renaissance Magus, Giordano Bruno, observed: “because of too long an intimacy with matter” a soul [Spirit] may become “too stubborn and inert for penetration by the rays [Divine Fires] of the splendour of the divine intelligence”. A receptive soul, however, when “softened and conquered by the heat and light... may become entirely luminous”¹.

Always, it is the Spiritual energies of Mercury, messenger of the gods, which summon and guide the Divine Spirit within the ‘coal’ (or ‘base matter’) of our bodies. But Mercury’s energies alone cannot ensure the successful outcome of the Spiritual quest.

And no individual, unaided, can gain the understanding, wisdom and discrimination necessary for such success. So, the Initiate must seek out whatever remains in our world of the timeless, unchanging energies of the Divine Source. Traditionally, such energies are found in those in whom the Spiritual flame burns with strength and purity – those who have, already, completed the journey successfully enough to have been judged by their peers to be a Master or Magus. Aided by such a Master, the Initiate is best able to develop the discrimination and balance needed for their own particular journey. Yet, since no two journeys are alike, there are no rules which can be taught, no pattern which can be strictly followed. Every Master, even one whose Spirit has been judged most pure, is human and, therefore, fallible. So, in choosing and following a Master or Masters, the Initiate must trust intuition and must exert constant discrimination and care. The onus, always, is on the questing Cabbalist to evaluate any teachings in the light of their own circumstances and their own developing knowledge and understanding. Their goal must be to perfect their own Spiritual strength, not simply to borrow or ape that of others.

All of this is reflected in the Hebrew letter for this Path, which is Shin, meaning 'Tooth'. Shin is described as being formed of three Vaus ('Nails'), each of which is topped by a Yod of Divine Spirit. All three rise from a common base-line, so that this three-fingered shape exhibits the unity, symmetry and energy of the three flames of Divine Love in our world: the Divine Spark in the human body; the Divine Wisdom, timeless and universal, which exists in our world; and the Divine Source of which both are a part. The three connected fingers of Shin also symbolize the trinities of Mother, Father, Child; body, Soul and Divine Spirit; and the three pillars of the Sephirothic Tree : Form (the coal of entropy); Force (the flame of decomposition); and the Middle Pillar of Balance (the Way).

All this triplicity and unity is reflected, too, in the Cabbalistic number for this Path – 21 – in which $2 + 1 = 3$ and $3 \times 7 = 21$ (where 7, the number of worldly completion, signifies the third, Spiritual, birth which should occur on this Path). The worldly nature of this Spiritual rebirth is also expressed in the Tarot number for this Path – 20 – in which 2×10 represents a second completion of the worldly cycle: the second 'death' which occurs with the return to the Earth of Malkuth.

Suitably, on the Traditional Tarot card, the Earthly representatives of the Supernal Triangle of Father, Mother and Child are shown emerging from the earth, summoned by the trumpet of an airy, Mercurial angel, which appears (as befits one of the most important energies of Hod) in clouds of glory. The male figure (Father; Reason), is set a little apart from the other two, both in position and by his abstract, Heavenward gaze. He clasps his hands together, as if absorbed in prayer or wonder. The woman (Mother; Intuition) holds the child's hand lovingly close to her heart. Her gaze could be on the child or on us, but it remains Earth-focussed. Between the man and the woman, with its back to us, is the child, whose circle of golden hair looks like an active but Earth-bound sun².

The child sits on the edge of a man-made grave or tomb, as if just emerging from it.

Father and Mother seem still to be partly immersed in the earth. All three are physically connected to the grave / tomb (as is appropriate for human figures) and thus, joined but separate, they resemble the three fingers of Shin, each golden-haired, as if blessed by a Yod of Divine Spirit. All three, too, are surrounded by green hills which stretch to the horizon and, so, they remain part of the world of Nature which is our world.

The flag which hangs from the trumpet of the summoning angel, displays a gold cross which divides a red field into four squares. This is the Alchemical symbol for the transforming Spiritual power of the Four Elements united in the Philosopher's Stone. The cross, too, like crossed paths on a field of red earth, signifies judgment and choice. Here, it is the new-born 'Divine Child' which is being summoned to judgment, and the wisdom and understanding which that 'child' has learned, based on a balanced unity of love and reason (symbolized by the Mother and Father), which will be tested.

'Fever' (BL 46 - 48), which is the poem on this Path of Judgment in the World of Atziluth, offers a clear and straightforward description of an actual event in Ted's and Sylvia's lives. And judgement and lack of judgment pervade this poem.

Shortly after their arrival in Spain, Sylvia suffered a "terrible siege of dysentery" (SPLH 14 July 1956) which left her "utterly weak"³. Sylvia wrote no more than two sentences about this in her letter to her mother, mentioning it only, it seems, so that she could boast of the care Ted took of her: telling her how he hypnotized her to sleep, so that she woke "completely cured and feeling wonderful". Ted's poem, however, describes everything in extravagant detail which is, at first, as excessive and over-wrought as is the behaviour he attributes in the poem to Sylvia.

Judgment and lack of judgment, both Ted's and Sylvia's, are readily apparent. Suitably, too, the exaggerated imagery and the almost childish language which Ted used at the start of the poem ironically suggest the 'Foolish', immature state of the couple at this stage of their shared journey, in life and in Cabbala. Sylvia, he says, had "eaten a baddie" and, feverish in her galleon-size bed, she cried that she was "going to die". Ted, "fancied" himself as "nursemaid" (a nice child-orientated choice of word and role), and he "masterfully" spooned soup into her "baby-bird gape". Even Ted's "promise" that this was the way in which Voltaire was cured of the plague, is an exaggeratedly foolish claim made, apparently, on false premises⁴. Only when Ted questions the truth of Sylvia's feverish state, and begins to recoil just "a little" (twice repeated) for "balance" and "symmetry", does the mood of his poem become more serious.

Sylvia's exaggerated emotional state in this poem is "a little bit crazy". She has hallucinatory dreams, panics, and is cut off from reality. Ted recalls that he too, to begin with, was role-playing, and it was this role-playing which made him feel that "things had become real". But, as he began to question and judge the situation, and to withdraw "just a little", he became aware of deeper, "chillier" thoughts, prompted by his own familiar, sceptical response to excess and unreality; aware, too, of the danger that his reactions to such excess might cloud his judgment. Looking back, as he wrote this poem, Ted remembered that it had "seemed easy" to judge Sylvia's behaviour and to

respond realistically to it; and comforting to think that he had been forewarned of dangers in “good time”. But he saw, too, that his self-confidence had been ‘Foolish’ and immature, and that the real reaction to a life-or-death situation is often helplessness: a feelingless, “callous”, protective “blank”, equivalent to that deadly state in which primitive creatures (those incapable of making a “choice”) “curl up and die”. Ted’s intuition had told him this at the time, but only at the very end of the poem does he describe himself as the unfeeling, “stone man” and Sylvia as the “burning woman”; and this seems to contradict his earlier claim that he had recoiled “just a little”. This seeming contradiction, however, was not accidental.

Plain as Ted’s poetic description of his and Sylvia’s reactions to that “real ailment” is, there is another, strongly Alchemical and Cabbalistic level to this poem. It is indicated by Ted’s choice of fire and stone as symbols for Sylvia and himself in the final lines of his poem; and it is present, throughout, in the Alchemical ‘conjunction of opposites’ which he explores.

Phoenix

Fire is the creative force of Nature, the agent of Alchemical transmutation, the Mercurial Spirit which is the same Divine Spirit symbolized in the ‘flames’ of Shin. Stone, like the ‘coal’ of Shin, is the Alchemist’s ‘base matter’, the Prima Materia of the body in which the Mercurial fire glows, and on which it feeds. Stone is the “passive receptive ground of all multiplicity and differentiation”⁵. Together, fire and stone can create the perfected, Spiritual Self, the Alchemical gold of ‘Our Fire-Stone’, the ‘medicinal virtue’ of which is its transmuting, healing power in our world. Ted and Sylvia, at this early stage of their shared journey, were spiritually equivalent to the impure, unhewn Alchemical Fire-Stone.

In ‘Fever’, as in Sylvia’s 1962 poem ‘Fever 103°’ (SPCP 231 - 2), where she describes the “triple tongues” of her spiritual fires as devouring and dangerous, Sylvia is sure she will die. But, whereas in ‘Fever 103°’ Sylvia is independent, strong, and able to make choices and let “old selves” dissolve as she aims for “Paradise”, in Ted’s poem, she is helplessly controlled by the fires which burn within her. Both poems describe the extremes of fever. And in both poems Sylvia instinctively turns to water for its cooling, healing powers. In Ted’s poem she seeks “oblivion” – a quenching of the fires which burn her: In her own poem, the water is cleansing and emetic – it makes her “retch”, so that pure, hot metal flies free. Neither approach is well-judged in Alchemical or Cabbalistic terms, for at this stage of the journey, in order to successfully balance a consuming fire with water, the wisdom and strength of Solomon is necessary⁶.

In ‘Fever’, the “familiar voice” of Ted’s “mother” wakes in him with some buried scrap of wisdom which he acts upon with (suitably) unquestioning certainty. Alchemically, however, it would seem that “mother” Nature dictated his use of “carrots, tomatoes, peppers and onions” in a “rainbow... elixir” of “essences”. And, in relation to their poetry, this was the time (in 1956) when Ted began to suggest subjects from nature to Sylvia as a means of earthing such euphoric fevers as those which are apparent in her ‘Epitaph for Fire and Flower’ (SPCP 45); or of sowing fertile seeds when she yearned

for inspiration, as she did in 'Black Rook in Rainy Weather' (SPCP 56 - 57)⁷. Ted, who was already steeped in nature, fed its healing essences into Sylvia who, as Lucas Myers remembers, was possessed by "extraordinary vital energy" but who needed the "soundness, rootedness and authenticity" which Ted brought her (CSBA 46 - 47). Ted, in turn, needed Sylvia's fire – needed the Mercurial spirit which he describes in her in many of the Birthday Letters poems – to balance his own Saturnine energies.

Alchemically, Mercury must be combined with Saturn, and Stone must be united with Fire, before the growth of the Spirit can begin. "Without contraries is no progression", as Blake wrote in his 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell'⁸. And Initiates, by learning to safely combine contrary Elements within themselves, learn to discriminate the real from the unreal – Truth from Error. Blake, who believed that "Exuberance is Beauty", also understood the need for balance: and he knew that this must be learned, and that "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough". In Spain, in 1956, Ted and Sylvia were in the process of learning this lesson.

So, in 'Fever', Ted brought the stone man and the burning woman together. But in these last three important lines of the poem, he twice repeats "I said nothing". Figuratively, this phrase joins the unit, 'I', with the empty circle of nothing to make the number ten – 10 – the number which represents the completion of a Spiritual journey. And, by repeating the phrase, Ted sets this poem firmly on the Path of Judgment and also associates it with the two 'deaths' (the end of two Spiritual cycles) which presage the final rebirth. Sylvia always regarded her first suicide attempt as her first death; but on the shared journey which she and Ted had just begun in 1956, the first 'death' was the Alchemical death which occurs when two separate Elements – Man and Woman; Sulphur and Mercury; Fire and Stone – are 'married' to become one.

Ted and Sylvia, on their honeymoon in Spain, were still learning the art of marital unity. In 'Fever', it is apparent that they had not yet got the balance right. And for Ted, as he suggests in the poem, the way in which he responded to Sylvia's fever marked the beginning of his own lack of judgment: it was the first occasion on which he discerned some lack of Truth in their behaviour, and yet he chose to say "nothing".

'Fever' strongly suggests that it was that first choice of silence, and the pattern it set, which Ted lamented. In the Birthday Letters sequence, it is clear that he eventually recognized the error he and Sylvia had made in believing that a shared Spiritual rebirth was possible; but in 'Fever' he documents another kind of misjudgment – one which caused a fatal imbalance in the Alchemical mixture, and which he did not rectify in time to prevent disaster. In a letter which Ted wrote to Lucas Myers in 1987, he wrote that if (in Myer's words) "he had not humoured [Sylvia] and nursed her like a patient and coddled her like a child" – if he had "carried on just as he was instead of wrapping his life up in a cupboard while he tended her" – they both would have "emerged in better shape" (CSBA 65).

Ted always accepted that it had been his own choice to (as he put it in a letter to Aurelia Plath⁹) concentrate on getting Sylvia "to the point of at last writing what she wanted to

write” whilst his own work carried on “anyhow, somehow”. And he blamed only himself for this error of judgment. But a pattern was set which Ted, as he tells us in ‘Fever’, repeated.

The position of ‘Fever’ on the Path of Judgment/Shin is critical to this interpretation, for Sylvia’s second ‘death’ was (as her poem ‘Fever 103’ indicates) again accompanied by feverish fires, through which she sought to accomplish, poetically and literally, the final separation that would set her Spirit free. Once again she was “burning” and “overloaded”: and again, Ted “said nothing”.

The fact that Ted offered no judgment of any kind, either during Sylvia’s Spanish fever or during this second feverish time, not only suggests the “overload of dilemma” that he felt on each occasion, it was also entirely consistent with his usual practice. Daniel Weissbort notes that “Ted would never directly warn or counsel”¹⁰; and Lucas Myers writes that Ted’s way was “to let others come at their own epiphanies rather than to confront differences” (CSBA 95).

Ted’s regret and his ultimate judgment of his own silence at these times when Sylvia “burned”, however, are starkly expressed in the bleak ‘Truths’ of the last three lines of ‘Fever’. Sylvia was “overloaded”. Ted “said nothing”; and, again, “said nothing”. Each, in the end, was a separate, contrary Element. The unwise, “stone man” “made soup” (not a pure essence). And “The burning woman”, unwisely, “drank it”.

‘Stubbing Wharfe’ (BL 106 - 108), on the Path of Judgment / Shin in the World of Briah, is full of images of the grave and of the dissolution and entropy which are part of the power of Shin. But it reveals, also, the endurance of the Eternal Flame – the fire in the heart which animates us, as it animated the five Yorkshire bowlers in this poem, even as the ‘Tooth’ of Shin gnaws at the body like an ulcer. The Tarot title for this Path is ‘The Spirit of Primal Fire’¹¹. This, Spirit, like the Cabbalistic ‘Flame’ which is bound to the corporeal ‘Coal’, is present in the “helpless laughter, agony, tears” of those bowlers as they “bursts” into “the hopeless old stone trap” of the Yorkshire valley which Ted describes. It is there, too, in the smiles with which the poem ends. Those “smiles”, and the “future” which eases open “a fraction” in the final line of the poem, reflect, too, the Cabbalistic meditation for this path, which is “Resurrection is hidden in death”¹².

Stubbing Wharf¹³ is a small mooring wharf on the edge of the town of Hebden Bridge in the Calder Valley. It lies, exactly as Ted describes it in his poem, between the Rochdale Canal and the River Calder, and it would have been a busy place during the Industrial Revolution, when Hebden Bridge was a thriving centre of the wool trade and the River Calder was known as “the hardest worked river in England” (E. ‘Notes’). By 1959, the date of events in Ted’s poem, industry had collapsed, the mills were derelict, and the whole area was, in Ted’s words, “virtually dead” (REO 8).

Hebden

In 1959, immediately after their return from America, Sylvia and Ted were staying with Ted’s parents in Heptonstall, a small village situated on the cliff which rises directly

opposite the Stubbing Wharf Pub. Metaphorically, they, like Stubbing Wharf itself, were “between the canal and the river”, having left the channelled, man-made route of steady jobs and a conventional pattern of life behind them but not yet entered the uncontrolled, turbulent river of experiences to which they had decided to commit themselves. So, on a cold, rainy, winter night, they sat in a “cold and empty” pub, “shut-in” by the steep banks, dark woods and bleak moorland which still overshadow it, and contemplated their uncertain future¹⁴.

Many of the graveyard images of natural decay and disintegration which Ted evoked in his poems in *Remains of Elmet* and *Elmet*, and which can be seen in Fay Godwin’s photographs of this Calder Valley area in these books, recur in ‘Stubbing Wharfe’. Nature prevails, with wind and cold, “and rain and rain” (‘Wild Rock’, ROE 40): but in nature there is also rebirth. Sylvia, “homesick, exhausted” and miserable, was also pregnant with new life. Nothing in these surroundings, nothing in the “blackness” which seemed to engulf her, matched the fertile, sunlit, “Lawrentian globe” she had envisioned¹⁵. Yet there was hope: the “garden swelled under all [their] words” and the world where they could “start living” was all before them.

Chillingly, a “local owl”, like a messenger of the Goddess whose prophetic powers are an important part of the Mercurial energies of Hod on this Path, brings Ted and Sylvia a prophetic vision of their future ‘homes’: Ted’s in a house he had known since childhood and which he bought seven years after Sylvia’s death; Sylvia’s in a grave in Heptonstall which is, “about 300 yards from that house”¹⁶. But, for the moment, each of them had a different vision of the future and it was their immediate situation which concerned them. The judgment they needed to make at this time, and on this Path, was that between matter and spirit. They needed to learn what local people had learned in this harsh environment: that the Primal Flame can thrive in it and can even burn more strongly because of the hardships. And it was the five local bowlers – survivors like Ted’s Grandad – who helped them to see this.

These five men seemed clownishly and drunkenly “helpless” in their agony and their laughter. Repeatedly, they drank and drained their glasses, “gulping” the spirits which filled and controlled them. They seemed like souls “tossed in hell”, but it also seemed that the agony and pain they endured “stoked” them, and produced ever more laughter. Ted’s poem ‘Singers’ (L 53; THCP 83), and his earlier poem, ‘Roarers in the Ring’ (HIR 42 - 43; THCP 38), celebrate these same, wild, enduring, life-affirming energies; as does, ‘Dick Straightup’ (L 17 - 19; THCP 63), where even the colloquial vulgarity of the title conveys the rude strength which characterizes these Yorkshire men, who seem to thrive on hardship in the “drunkenness of time”. So essential did Ted consider these energies – this Primal Fire which helps us to survive – that he ended ‘Singers’ with “a curse on the age that loses the tune”.

In ‘Stubbing Wharfe’, the energies which fill these drinkers overflow and touch Ted and Sylvia, too. And suddenly, their focus is no longer completely on their own problems. These men’s bacchanalian laughter in the face of pain and death, draws an involuntary smile from each of them. And with these smiles comes a small glimmer of

enlightenment – a small easing of the darkness in the “dead-end tunnel” in which they seemed to be trapped – and glimpse of a way into the future. On this Path of Judgment, in the concept-shaping World of Briah, this was a lesson in the essential interdependence of material and spiritual energies which they needed to learn. Importantly, too, it was also a lesson about their own membership of the human race; about its fundamental unity; and about the strengths and weaknesses which they, consequently, shared.

‘Being Christlike’ (BL 153), the Judgment / Shin poem in the World of Yetzira, is a lament which is constructed with utmost care, so that its rhythms and line-breaks create emphasis and, at the same time, offer subtle variations of meaning. It is a poem full of paradox, misjudgment and error. And paradox begins with the title, which is the first of the twenty-two lines of the poem which make up one complete worldly, Malkuthian, Yetziratic journey around the Sephirothic Tree.

Sylvia’s search for wholeness and healing had begun with her first suicide. She had always considered this to be a death; and she had lain in the ‘tomb’ under the house for three days before returning to life¹⁷. In this pattern of death and resurrection Sylvia was “[b]eing Christlike”. But she “did not want to be Christlike”. Rather, she saw herself as “Lady Lazarus”, brought back from the dead to seek her own salvation, not that of others. She did not want to be Christlike and be burdened by others. But her error was to believe that she could isolate herself, even from her own “flesh and blood”, and liberate and heal herself without affecting anyone else.

Although, like Christ, Sylvia had worshipped her father and “no other” and had sacrificed everything “to be with him” so that she might find her true Poetic Self, she was not seeking to be united with her Father in Heaven, as Christ was. She was seeking to join her father “[i]n wherever he was” – in the tomb or in the Underworld – somewhere which she thought not only her body but even her family might prevent her from reaching. Here, too, her judgment was faulty, for, as Giordano Bruno wrote: “the soul is in the body in such a way that its superior part may be removed to join and attach itself to divine things as by an indissoluble vow”, corporeal concerns, therefore, “will not tyrannize over” the poet who is truly divinely inspired any more than he or she allows them to.¹⁸

And, although Sylvia likened herself to a mystic in her poem of that title (SPCP 268 - 269), she rejected formal religion. Her faith was in herself, not in God.¹⁹ As Ted wrote in ‘Religion’ (H&W; THCP 1174), Sylvia was her “own Church”. Her religion was “Love”, but her “mythos” required the sacrifice of others; and her whole purpose was not, literally, to die but to save herself through poetic rebirth.

Sylvia did, however, set up her father as “a false god”. Ted’s phrasing in lines 19 - 21 of ‘Being Christlike’, ambiguously suggests that Sylvia rejected as a false god any god who was not her father and yet, paradoxically, the father-god she “wanted” was her own representation of her father – a product of her memory and imagination which was not, truly, Otto Plath.

As on the Traditional Tarot card, father, mother and child are present in Ted's poem, but the necessary balance and unity between them is absent. Sylvia's love is focussed on her father: she rejects her mother. And there is ambiguity and paradox in the lines in which Ted describes this rejection. The "stranger" who tried to "tempt" Sylvia from her father was, perhaps, Aurelia Plath: but more surely, she was Sylvia's imagined recreation of her mother in her journal after her sessions with Ruth Beuscher (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958 - 13 June 1959), and in her poem 'Medusa'. Yet, this "stranger" with her "great hooded eyes" is also the Moon Goddess – the "bald", "wild", terrible Moon which Sylvia described as "my mother" in 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' (SPCP 172 - 173). This mother was not "sweet Mary", mother of Christ, but a mother to be feared; a mother who, in Sylvia's last poem 'Edge' (SPCP 272 - 273) stares chillingly from her "hood of bone".

Ted, by the careful placement of line-breaks in his poem, emphasized the way in which this moon mother had come very close to Sylvia: "so close", he wrote, with her moon eyes "Promising the earth you saw", that "Your fate and you cried". Clearly, if the meaning of poem is understood by ignoring the line-breaks, observing the punctuation, and accepting that the mother mentioned is Aurelia Plath, then it seems that Sylvia rejected Aurelia's tempting; and reacted to the fate that she saw in Aurelia's eyes, as if Aurelia were the Devil. Which is, perhaps, what Sylvia did do. But the careful structure of Ted's lines offers the additional view, that Sylvia feared and rejected the Goddess's strange world and the strange powers the Moon seemed to have over her: that she rejected Mother Nature in favour of the Father's rational, familiar, will-driven ways.

And yet another, much more contentious, reading is possible if each line is taken to embody a discrete thought. "Your fate and you cried", suggests a personified fate, such as the Greek Goddess, Atropos, who is one of the three weird sisters who decree the pattern of each human life. It suggests that Atropos, the Fate who inexorably decrees the moment of death, cried out at the blandishments offered to Sylvia by her sister Lachesis or Chance, whose primal energies determine the length of an individual's life.

Such a reading might seem obscure and untenable, except that nothing in these Birthday Letters poems can safely be regarded as unintended. And Ted's reference to the mother's hooded, moon-eyes, recalls the staring moon-mother in Sylvia's poem 'Edge', where Sylvia, herself, links death with "Greek necessity", and thus suggests the inescapable Fate, Atropos. All the Greek Fates, too, were the daughters of Themis, Goddess of Justice and Wisdom. Her final judgment on this particular Path is (like death) inescapable, but the time of arrival of both is unpredictable. And, whilst Chance, (Lachesis, the 'Drawer of Lots') may postpone death for a while, her jealous sister, Atropos, would certainly object.

So, Aurelia; the Moon-mother, Hecate; Atropos; and the mother Sylvia created in her imagination, all were rejected. Ted chose to express this rejection in the words which Christ used to reject Satan, when Satan promised Him the world (Luke 4:8), but Sylvia did not want to be self-less, like Christ. She "wanted" life and acknowledgment, and the "great love" that she yearned for in her poem 'Mystic'. But her judgment was faulty, her

discrimination flawed, her god false, and her whole approach unbalanced.

Four times, Ted repeats, “you did not want to be Christlike”. Like the cross on the flag of the Tarot angel’s summoning trumpet, which divides the red field into four, this signifies the fourfold, Earthly, fundamental element of choice which Sylvia had in our world²⁰. But wise choices require careful judgment. And Ted’s own judgment, as he wrote this poem, was that Sylvia’s judgment had been fatally flawed, and her choices had been made on false premises. Christ, like any teacher who has been judged by their peers to be a Master or Magus, might have taught Sylvia some wisdom. But Sylvia was determined to find and follow her own way; and the choices she made on her journey showed, quite clearly, that she did not want to be Christlike.

The final poem on this Path, a poem which describes Sylvia’s final resting-place in the material world of Assiah, is ‘The Dogs Are Eating Your Mother’ (BL 195 196). Still, the dogs which barked after Sylvia in ‘God Help the Wolf...’ (BL 26 - 27) pursue her. But now, these human dogs – the dogs of “our Academy”, who were described by the Hermeticist, Marsilio Ficino, as fraudulent “philosophers” who “bark for the sake of public opinion, and bite and tear”²¹, come, in Ted’s poem, like “a kind of hyena” to “pull at her remains”.²²

The poem begins with a distinction between body and spirit. And Ted describes Sylvia’s death in metaphors full of Cabbalistic meaning. It is apparent that he and Sylvia had climbed sufficiently high in their struggle towards the Source, for Sylvia’s impetuous, impatient, premature leap from the window through which they saw its light to prove fatal. And this high ‘window’ was, for each of them, the well-developed, creative imagination, through which they ‘saw’ the images which inspired their work.

Sylvia’s ‘fall’, on this Path of Judgment / Shin, brought her Cabbalistic journey full circle and returned her to earth. This was the second ‘death’, which is expected on this Path, and Ted buried her in the earth “where she fell”, so that she might be reborn through Nature’s cycles. Also, Sylvia’s fall (like that of Icarus) was due to misjudgment of her own powers: failure to take into account her Earth-born, human frailty, and, consequently, failure to judge carefully the timing and the delicate balance necessary for her flight. Metaphorically, as Sylvia described it in her own poem, ‘Mystic’, (SPCP 268 - 269), she flew so high that she was “used utterly, in the sun’s conflagration”. So, (metaphorically and literally) after the euphoria of success, Sylvia fell into darkness and returned to the earth.

Plath grave

For Ted, as for all Cabbalists, death is both an end and a beginning. He wrote of the earth around Heptonstall, where he buried Sylvia, as the “cradle-grave” (‘Abel Cross...’ THCP 455), and the place into which everything returns for renewal – “the only future” (‘Lumb Chimneys’ THCP 456 - 457). So, in ‘The Dogs Are eating Your Mother’, Sylvia’s grave is a place where children play, rather than weep. The things which the children and Ted “arrange” – things they had “carried from Appledore”, as if they were Sylvia “herself” (and this ‘self’ suggests her spirit, not her body) – are simple, beautiful things

of Nature. And Appledore (a small town in Bideford Bay on the north Devon coast) evokes in its fruit-filled name, memories of the childhood of Earth, and of the fruit which caused the Biblical 'Fall from Paradise' of our First Mother, Eve. Appledore also, recalls the innocent and foolish hero, Sir Thomas Tom of Appledore, "The Knight whose Armour Didn't Squeak"²³, which strongly evokes childhood memories for anyone whose childhood contained the poetry of A.A. Milne (as Sylvia's and her children's certainly did²⁴).

So, death and childhood are linked in Ted's poem, which is, ostensibly, advice to his and Sylvia's children. And part of this advice is that Nicholas and Frieda should immerse themselves in Nature, far away from all the unpleasantness²⁵. But the poem is also a prayer for the release of Sylvia's spirit. And even the scavenging dogs, who "are not dogs", but people "who / will drop on all fours" to become voracious animals fighting over Sylvia's remains, are made to serve a purpose in releasing her Spirit for rebirth. They "batten" on the "cornucopia" of Sylvia's body of work, and on every material thing which was hers, including "the very soil". And the various meanings of 'soil', here suggests Plath grave defaced not only the earth around Sylvia's body but also things excremental and stained, as if nothing is too vile for these 'dogs' to swallow. Ted's pleas – "So leave her" and "Think her better" – stand out from the text, because of their careful placement. And they are reinforced by other words and phrases which, in these last lines of the poem, have the directive strength of magical commands: "Go wrap / Your head"; "Cover / Your eyes"; "Let them", the dogs, get on with their distasteful quarrels.

That Ted intended these commands at the end of this poem, on this particular Path, to have magical import, is suggested by a number of things. Firstly, by his belief in the particular, magical power of words – especially in poetry, which he once described as "one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen"²⁶. Secondly, by the fact (noted earlier in this chapter) that it was not in Ted's nature, normally, to issue commands to others. But most importantly, by the way in which the poems which immediately precede this one in the World of Assiah have laid the foundations for the Spiritual rebirth which will bring Sylvia, whole and unencumbered by ghosts or spirits, "back into the sun" for a last judgment.

The phrase, 'back into the sun', is repeated twice in the final four lines of the poem.

Firstly, Ted instructs his children, himself and us, to rationally "Think her" (Sylvia) "with holy care", into a place where final release and judgment of her Spirit can be brought about. Vultures feed on dead bodies, but they also have a long mythological association with the after-life and with judgement: The Indian Parsee community place their dead on high platforms for vultures to feed on, so that the Soul may be released. And Ted's vulture in Cave Birds, is "The Interrogator" and "the sun's keyhole" (CB 12; THCP 421)²⁷.

Scarab

Secondly, Ted commands the use of creative imagination for this same purpose. So,

the 'dogs' become beetles. And beetles, like the scarab beetle that lays its eggs in dung and rolls them into the sun to hatch, also have ancient symbolic and sacred associations with the Sun-god and with rebirth.

So, in these final lines, Ted carefully balanced thought with imagination. Flying like Daedalus, on stronger, more mature wings and with infinitely more care than Sylvia or Icarus had managed, he negotiated a way between the Father's solar, rational powers and the Mother's moony, imaginative powers, in his attempt to bring Sylvia "back into the sun" for final judgment and rebirth. At the same time, he magically commanded that the voracious mouths of the 'dogs' be turned into valuable, natural aids to this endeavour. They, if his magic works well, will devour the 'shells' in which the Truth lies concealed. So, human mouths may deconstruct, maul and gulp Sylvia's remains²⁸ and the 'dogs' of the Academy may argue, posture and "vomit / Over their symposia", but what will eventually be revealed will be whatever fragments of timeless, eternal, universal Truth Sylvia managed to channel into her work. And on these alone will she finally be judged by her peers in our world.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Bruno, De Gli Eroici Furori. Part 2. Dialogue 1:IX.
- 2 All three human figures have golden hair but only the child's resembles a swirling sun.
3. This illness took place before Sylvia made her drawings of Benidorm (see SPLH 25 Aug. 1956). So, again, the events of this poem and of the poem which immediately precedes it in Birthday Letters, do not conform to the actual chronological order of events. Both poems, however, conform to the requirements of the particular Cabbalistic Paths on which Ted placed them.
4. I can find no evidence that Voltaire ever had plague, although he had been a sickly child at a time when plague was rife in the country. It is relevant to this path, though, that Voltaire had responded to the sick, feverish excesses of the Roman Catholic Church in France with excessive zeal and had become in the process like "a stone man", governed by rationality and immune to the wonders of Nature, imagination and Spirit. It was for this lack of vision that Blake attacked him in his notes to 'The Last Judgment', where he wrote that Voltaire had "embraced Error and rejected Truth" (Blake, Ibid. p.327).
5. Burkhardt, Alchemy, Element Books, Dorset, 1986. p. 69.
6. The Alchemical symbol of Solomon's Seal (a six-pointed star) unites the symbol for Water (an inverted triangle) with that of Fire (an upright triangle), to represent the balance and harmony of Love. This is also the Star of Venus.
7. In a letter to her mother (SPLH 6 Nov. 1956), Sylvia described herself as "emotionally exhausted" by stresses in her own life but also by "the Hungarian and Suez affairs".

Ted, it seems, immersed both of them in nature for relief. And Sylvia wrote that “the creative forces of nature” were the only ones which now gave her any peace, and that she and Ted wanted “to become part of them”.

8. Blake, *Ibid.* p. 46.

9. James Bone, *The Times*, 8 April 2000, 2W. p. 10. Quotation from a letter from Ted Hughes to Aurelia Plath, which is now held at Emory University.

10. *Letters to Ted*, ‘Notes’, p. 108. Daniel Weissbort, like Lucas Myers, was a close friend of Ted’s from the time they were students at Cambridge University until Ted’s death in 1998.

11. Crowley, 777, p. 34.

12. Crowley, *Gematria*, p. 25.

13. Ted consistently used the spelling ‘Wharfe’, which is also the name of another Yorkshire river and its valley just north of the Calder. Current spelling appears to be Wharf, without the ‘e’.

14. Stubbing Wharf Pub, as shown in photographs which can be found on the Internet (search ‘Stubbing Wharf + Rochdale + canal’) looks pleasantly welcoming in the sun, but it is set in a steep-sided valley and can look very dark, bleak, damp and gloomy in Winter.

15. Sylvia greatly admired the way D. H. Lawrence “bodies the world forth in his words” (SPJ 15 Sept. 1958). And Ted’s reference to ‘gentians’ so close to ‘Lawrentian globe’ suggests that Lawrence’s poem ‘Bavarian gentians’ was in his mind. In that poem, Lawrence links passion with death and he also asks for “three dark flames” (like the flames of Shin) to light the “living dark” into which he will go.

Lumb Bank

16. In his letter to the German translators, Andrea and Robert (16 June 1998), Ted noted that Heptonstall was where his mother’s family had always been buried. He wrote, too, that the house he bought (Lumb Bank) “eventually became one of the centres of the Arvon Foundation”, where courses are run “by writers for aspiring writers”.

17. In 1956, using words which have Biblical echoes, Sylvia wrote in her journal: “Being dead, I rose again” (SPJ 19 Feb. 1956).

18. Bruno, *De Gli Eroi Furori*, *Ibid.* Second Part. Dialogue 1: IV.

19. In 1952, Sylvia undertook a detailed analysis of her beliefs about God and concluded that we all construct our own “absolutely real dream Kingdoms –

paradoxically all 'true'" (SPJ 25 July 1952). And at Easter 1959, she wrote of "the risen Christ meaning only a parable of human renewal and nothing of immortality" (SPJ 29 Sept. 1959).

20. Four is the number of stable foundations and balance, it represents the Four Mother Elements from which every material thing is made, and so four is the number of Earth. The cross, which cuts the red field into carefully balanced quarters, represents wise choice in our world, and the whole flag is a symbol of the harmony and wholeness which careful judgment will maintain.

21. Marsilio Ficino, 'What Is Necessary For Composure In Life And For Tranquillity Of The Soul', Book of Life, (1489), Trans. Boer. Spring Publications, Texas, 1980.

22. How, I wonder, can I analyse this poem, when those who "batten" on Sylvia and her work are so angrily and bitterly described?. I can only hope to be one of Ficino's "legitimate philosophers" who "search for truth". And I must repeat that it is the nature of the Cabbalistic journey that each person must make it for themselves. My understanding of Ted's poems is the product of my own journey and my own fragmentary attempts to peel back some of the shells within which the Truth lies hidden. Others will read Birthday Letters quite differently. "Every story", as Ted wrote in 'Myth and Education', "is still the original cauldron of wisdom, full of new visions and new life" (WP 142). And Birthday Letters is "only a story". It is Ted's story and Sylvia's story, but, through the powers of imagination, it can also be "Your story. My story" ('Visit', BL 9). . What matters most of all, are the whole, un-"torn" poems, through which the story is told.

23. It seems, from Milne's poem, that Sir Thomas Tom was a Kentish knight, not a Devonian. Appledore in Kent, however, is not a seaside town.

24. Sylvia wrote of being "brought up in the fairy-tale world of Mary Poppins and Winnie-the-Pooh" (SPJ Dec. 1950. Journal Page 38). She also mentioned both again in 1962, at the time when she was immersed in "the loving slovenliness of motherhood" (SPJ 1962. Appendix 15).

25. The Brooks Range is in far north Alaska, where Nicholas Hughes was living when Ted wrote this poem. The Nullarbor Plains are in Australia, where Frieda lived at that time. Both places are huge, natural wildernesses.

26. Ted Hughes. The Critical Forum . Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978. A copy of this tape is held with other Norwich Tapes in the Library of The University of Birmingham.

27. The mythological associations of Ted's Cave Birds vulture are discussed in detail in Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest, pp. 71 - 73.

28. The 'Hughes' part of Sylvia's name (the public 'face' she wore as Ted's wife) has frequently been torn from her headstone. There have been verbal and legal battles, too,

about some of the ways in which Sylvia, her life, and her work, have been posthumously presented by authors, film-makers, critics and scholars.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalJudgment CardShin path

The Path of Judgment – Shin

Tarot card 20. Tree Path 21.

Joining Sephiroth 8 (Hod) and 10 (Malkuth).

'Fever', 'Stubbing Wharfe', 'Being Christlike', 'The Dogs Are Eating Your Mother'.

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The Path of Judgment joins the Mercurial energies of Hod (8 – Glory) to the energies of Malkuth (10 – Kingdom), the Sephira which is also known as 'The Inferior Mother and Bride', 'The Gate of Death' and 'The Gate of Eden'. Now, the naked children who were joined in harmony on the Path of the Sun may give birth to a 'Spiritual Child', thus completing the Earthly pattern which reflects the transformative power of the Supernal Triangle at the apex of the Tree. To do this, the journeyer must be immersed again in the Motherly element of Malkuth, which is Earth. This immersion is known in Cabbala as the 'second death'.

In Cabbala, it is said that the journeyer must die twice and be reborn three times before the Spiritual goal can be achieved. The first 'death' is that of the Fool who begins the Cabbalistic journey: and the 'second birth' is that of the Initiate in whom the glow of a Divine Spark has been revealed. This Spark, however, still requires long and careful nurturing before it can grow into a pure, strong flame. Only on the Path of Judgment, as the Initiate nears the end of the Cabbalistic journey, is that embodied Spirit likely to be pure enough and strong enough to be exposed to the Divine Fire which is the Governing Element of this Path. At this stage, the Spiritual flame of the Initiate will be subjected to some fierce external assay. Bodily, material qualities, which (like Mother and Father) nurtured the Spirit with Love and shaped it with Reason, will be stripped away so that the timeless, universal, healing powers of a 'Spiritual Child' may be revealed.

For the Cabbalist, as for the Alchemist, the Spirit exists in the body like the hidden

power of fire within a coal. This fire may be lit by energies, such as love, which link it to the Divine Source. And, just as fire creates change within a coal and the coal feeds the fire, so, once touched by Divine energies, the process of change within the embodied Spirit is inevitable. The interdependence between fire and coal is necessary, but the changes which take place are unpredictable, because they depend not only on the purity of the coal but on outside factors, too. As the Renaissance Magus, Giordano Bruno, observed: “because of too long an intimacy with matter” a soul [Spirit] may become “too stubborn and inert for penetration by the rays [Divine Fires] of the splendour of the divine intelligence”. A receptive soul, however, when “softened and conquered by the heat and light... may become entirely luminous”¹.

Always, it is the Spiritual energies of Mercury, messenger of the gods, which summon and guide the Divine Spirit within the ‘coal’ (or ‘base matter’) of our bodies. But Mercury’s energies alone cannot ensure the successful outcome of the Spiritual quest. And no individual, unaided, can gain the understanding, wisdom and discrimination necessary for such success. So, the Initiate must seek out whatever remains in our world of the timeless, unchanging energies of the Divine Source. Traditionally, such energies are found in those in whom the Spiritual flame burns with strength and purity – those who have, already, completed the journey successfully enough to have been judged by their peers to be a Master or Magus. Aided by such a Master, the Initiate is best able to develop the discrimination and balance needed for their own particular journey. Yet, since no two journeys are alike, there are no rules which can be taught, no pattern which can be strictly followed. Every Master, even one whose Spirit has been judged most pure, is human and, therefore, fallible. So, in choosing and following a Master or Masters, the Initiate must trust intuition and must exert constant discrimination and care. The onus, always, is on the questing Cabbalist to evaluate any teachings in the light of their own circumstances and their own developing knowledge and understanding. Their goal must be to perfect their own Spiritual strength, not simply to borrow or ape that of others.

All of this is reflected in the Hebrew letter for this Path, which is Shin, meaning ‘Tooth’. Shin is described as being formed of three Vaus (‘Nails’), each of which is topped by a Yod of Divine Spirit. All three rise from a common base-line, so that this three-fingered shape exhibits the unity, symmetry and energy of the three flames of Divine Love in our world: the Divine Spark in the human body; the Divine Wisdom, timeless and universal, which exists in our world; and the Divine Source of which both are a part. The three connected fingers of Shin also symbolize the trinities of Mother, Father, Child; body, Soul and Divine Spirit; and the three pillars of the Sephirothic Tree : Form (the coal of entropy); Force (the flame of decomposition); and the Middle Pillar of Balance (the Way).

All this triplicity and unity is reflected, too, in the Cabbalistic number for this Path – 21 – in which $2 + 1 = 3$ and $3 \times 7 = 21$ (where 7, the number of worldly completion, signifies the third, Spiritual, birth which should occur on this Path). The worldly nature of this Spiritual rebirth is also expressed in the Tarot number for this Path – 20 – in which 2×10 represents a second completion of the worldly cycle: the second ‘death’ which

occurs with the return to the Earth of Malkuth.

Suitably, on the Traditional Tarot card, the Earthly representatives of the Supernal Triangle of Father, Mother and Child are shown emerging from the earth, summoned by the trumpet of an airy, Mercurial angel, which appears (as befits one of the most important energies of Hod) in clouds of glory. The male figure (Father; Reason), is set a little apart from the other two, both in position and by his abstract, Heavenward gaze. He clasps his hands together, as if absorbed in prayer or wonder. The woman (Mother; Intuition) holds the child's hand lovingly close to her heart. Her gaze could be on the child or on us, but it remains Earth-focussed. Between the man and the woman, with its back to us, is the child, whose circle of golden hair looks like an active but Earth-bound sun².

The child sits on the edge of a man-made grave or tomb, as if just emerging from it. Father and Mother seem still to be partly immersed in the earth. All three are physically connected to the grave / tomb (as is appropriate for human figures) and thus, joined but separate, they resemble the three fingers of Shin, each golden-haired, as if blessed by a Yod of Divine Spirit. All three, too, are surrounded by green hills which stretch to the horizon and, so, they remain part of the world of Nature which is our world.

The flag which hangs from the trumpet of the summoning angel, displays a gold cross which divides a red field into four squares. This is the Alchemical symbol for the transforming Spiritual power of the Four Elements united in the Philosopher's Stone. The cross, too, like crossed paths on a field of red earth, signifies judgment and choice. Here, it is the new-born 'Divine Child' which is being summoned to judgment, and the wisdom and understanding which that 'child' has learned, based on a balanced unity of love and reason (symbolized by the Mother and Father), which will be tested.

'Fever' (BL 46 - 48), which is the poem on this Path of Judgment in the World of Atziluth, offers a clear and straightforward description of an actual event in Ted's and Sylvia's lives. And judgement and lack of judgment pervade this poem.

Shortly after their arrival in Spain, Sylvia suffered a "terrible siege of dysentery" (SPLH 14 July 1956) which left her "utterly weak"³. Sylvia wrote no more than two sentences about this in her letter to her mother, mentioning it only, it seems, so that she could boast of the care Ted took of her: telling her how he hypnotized her to sleep, so that she woke "completely cured and feeling wonderful". Ted's poem, however, describes everything in extravagant detail which is, at first, as excessive and over-wrought as is the behaviour he attributes in the poem to Sylvia.

Judgment and lack of judgment, both Ted's and Sylvia's, are readily apparent. Suitably, too, the exaggerated imagery and the almost childish language which Ted used at the start of the poem ironically suggest the 'Foolish', immature state of the couple at this stage of their shared journey, in life and in Cabbala. Sylvia, he says, had "eaten a baddie" and, feverish in her galleon-size bed, she cried that she was "going to die". Ted, "fancied" himself as "nursemaid" (a nice child-orientated choice of word and role), and

he “masterfully” spooned soup into her “baby-bird gape”. Even Ted’s “promise” that this was the way in which Voltaire was cured of the plague, is an exaggeratedly foolish claim made, apparently, on false premises⁴. Only when Ted questions the truth of Sylvia’s feverish state, and begins to recoil just “a little” (twice repeated) for “balance” and “symmetry”, does the mood of his poem become more serious.

Sylvia’s exaggerated emotional state in this poem is “a little bit crazy”. She has hallucinatory dreams, panics, and is cut off from reality. Ted recalls that he too, to begin with, was role-playing, and it was this role-playing which made him feel that “things had become real”. But, as he began to question and judge the situation, and to withdraw “just a little”, he became aware of deeper, “chillier” thoughts, prompted by his own familiar, sceptical response to excess and unreality; aware, too, of the danger that his reactions to such excess might cloud his judgment. Looking back, as he wrote this poem, Ted remembered that it had “seemed easy” to judge Sylvia’s behaviour and to respond realistically to it; and comforting to think that he had been forewarned of dangers in “good time”. But he saw, too, that his self-confidence had been ‘Foolish’ and immature, and that the real reaction to a life-or-death situation is often helplessness: a feelingless, “callous”, protective “blank”, equivalent to that deadly state in which primitive creatures (those incapable of making a “choice”) “curl up and die”. Ted’s intuition had told him this at the time, but only at the very end of the poem does he describe himself as the unfeeling, “stone man” and Sylvia as the “burning woman”; and this seems to contradict his earlier claim that he had recoiled “just a little”. This seeming contradiction, however, was not accidental.

Plain as Ted’s poetic description of his and Sylvia’s reactions to that “real ailment” is, there is another, strongly Alchemical and Cabbalistic level to this poem. It is indicated by Ted’s choice of fire and stone as symbols for Sylvia and himself in the final lines of his poem; and it is present, throughout, in the Alchemical ‘conjunction of opposites’ which he explores.

Phoenix

Fire is the creative force of Nature, the agent of Alchemical transmutation, the Mercurial Spirit which is the same Divine Spirit symbolized in the ‘flames’ of Shin. Stone, like the ‘coal’ of Shin, is the Alchemist’s ‘base matter’, the Prima Materia of the body in which the Mercurial fire glows, and on which it feeds. Stone is the “passive receptive ground of all multiplicity and differentiation”⁵. Together, fire and stone can create the perfected, Spiritual Self, the Alchemical gold of ‘Our Fire-Stone’, the ‘medicinal virtue’ of which is its transmuting, healing power in our world. Ted and Sylvia, at this early stage of their shared journey, were spiritually equivalent to the impure, unhewn Alchemical Fire-Stone.

In ‘Fever’, as in Sylvia’s 1962 poem ‘Fever 103°’ (SPCP 231 - 2), where she describes the “triple tongues” of her spiritual fires as devouring and dangerous, Sylvia is sure she will die. But, whereas in ‘Fever 103°’ Sylvia is independent, strong, and able to make choices and let “old selves” dissolve as she aims for “Paradise”, in Ted’s poem, she is helplessly controlled by the fires which burn within her. Both poems describe the

extremes of fever. And in both poems Sylvia instinctively turns to water for its cooling, healing powers. In Ted's poem she seeks "oblivion" – a quenching of the fires which burn her: In her own poem, the water is cleansing and emetic – it makes her "retch", so that pure, hot metal flies free. Neither approach is well-judged in Alchemical or Cabbalistic terms, for at this stage of the journey, in order to successfully balance a consuming fire with water, the wisdom and strength of Solomon is necessary⁶.

In 'Fever', the "familiar voice" of Ted's "mother" wakes in him with some buried scrap of wisdom which he acts upon with (suitably) unquestioning certainty. Alchemically, however, it would seem that "mother" Nature dictated his use of "carrots, tomatoes, peppers and onions" in a "rainbow... elixir" of "essences". And, in relation to their poetry, this was the time (in 1956) when Ted began to suggest subjects from nature to Sylvia as a means of earthing such euphoric fevers as those which are apparent in her 'Epitaph for Fire and Flower' (SPCP 45); or of sowing fertile seeds when she yearned for inspiration, as she did in 'Black Rook in Rainy Weather' (SPCP 56 - 57)⁷. Ted, who was already steeped in nature, fed its healing essences into Sylvia who, as Lucas Myers remembers, was possessed by "extraordinary vital energy" but who needed the "soundness, rootedness and authenticity" which Ted brought her (CSBA 46 - 47). Ted, in turn, needed Sylvia's fire – needed the Mercurial spirit which he describes in her in many of the Birthday Letters poems – to balance his own Saturnine energies.

Alchemically, Mercury must be combined with Saturn, and Stone must be united with Fire, before the growth of the Spirit can begin. "Without contraries is no progression", as Blake wrote in his 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell'⁸. And Initiates, by learning to safely combine contrary Elements within themselves, learn to discriminate the real from the unreal – Truth from Error. Blake, who believed that "Exuberance is Beauty", also understood the need for balance: and he knew that this must be learned, and that "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough". In Spain, in 1956, Ted and Sylvia were in the process of learning this lesson.

So, in 'Fever', Ted brought the stone man and the burning woman together. But in these last three important lines of the poem, he twice repeats "I said nothing". Figuratively, this phrase joins the unit, 'I', with the empty circle of nothing to make the number ten – 10 – the number which represents the completion of a Spiritual journey. And, by repeating the phrase, Ted sets this poem firmly on the Path of Judgment and also associates it with the two 'deaths' (the end of two Spiritual cycles) which presage the final rebirth. Sylvia always regarded her first suicide attempt as her first death; but on the shared journey which she and Ted had just begun in 1956, the first 'death' was the Alchemical death which occurs when two separate Elements – Man and Woman; Sulphur and Mercury; Fire and Stone – are 'married' to become one.

Ted and Sylvia, on their honeymoon in Spain, were still learning the art of marital unity. In 'Fever', it is apparent that they had not yet got the balance right. And for Ted, as he suggests in the poem, the way in which he responded to Sylvia's fever marked the beginning of his own lack of judgment: it was the first occasion on which he discerned some lack of Truth in their behaviour, and yet he chose to say "nothing".

'Fever' strongly suggests that it was that first choice of silence, and the pattern it set, which Ted lamented. In the Birthday Letters sequence, it is clear that he eventually recognized the error he and Sylvia had made in believing that a shared Spiritual rebirth was possible; but in 'Fever' he documents another kind of misjudgment – one which caused a fatal imbalance in the Alchemical mixture, and which he did not rectify in time to prevent disaster. In a letter which Ted wrote to Lucas Myers in 1987, he wrote that if (in Myer's words) "he had not humoured [Sylvia] and nursed her like a patient and coddled her like a child" – if he had "carried on just as he was instead of wrapping his life up in a cupboard while he tended her" – they both would have "emerged in better shape" (CSBA 65).

Ted always accepted that it had been his own choice to (as he put it in a letter to Aurelia Plath⁹) concentrate on getting Sylvia "to the point of at last writing what she wanted to write" whilst his own work carried on "anyhow, somehow". And he blamed only himself for this error of judgment. But a pattern was set which Ted, as he tells us in 'Fever', repeated.

The position of 'Fever' on the Path of Judgment/Shin is critical to this interpretation, for Sylvia's second 'death' was (as her poem 'Fever 103' indicates) again accompanied by feverish fires, through which she sought to accomplish, poetically and literally, the final separation that would set her Spirit free. Once again she was "burning" and "overloaded": and again, Ted "said nothing".

The fact that Ted offered no judgment of any kind, either during Sylvia's Spanish fever or during this second feverish time, not only suggests the "overload of dilemma" that he felt on each occasion, it was also entirely consistent with his usual practice. Daniel Weissbort notes that "Ted would never directly warn or counsel"¹⁰; and Lucas Myers writes that Ted's way was "to let others come at their own epiphanies rather than to confront differences" (CSBA 95).

Ted's regret and his ultimate judgment of his own silence at these times when Sylvia "burned", however, are starkly expressed in the bleak 'Truths' of the last three lines of 'Fever'. Sylvia was "overloaded". Ted "said nothing"; and, again, "said nothing". Each, in the end, was a separate, contrary Element. The unwise, "stone man" "made soup" (not a pure essence). And "The burning woman", unwisely, "drank it".

'stubbing Wharfe' (BL 106 - 108), on the Path of Judgment / Shin in the World of Briah, is full of images of the grave and of the dissolution and entropy which are part of the power of Shin. But it reveals, also, the endurance of the Eternal Flame – the fire in the heart which animates us, as it animated the five Yorkshire bowlers in this poem, even as the 'Tooth' of Shin gnaws at the body like an ulcer. The Tarot title for this Path is 'The Spirit of Primal Fire'¹¹. This, Spirit, like the Cabbalistic 'Flame' which is bound to the corporeal 'Coal', is present in the "helpless laughter, agony, tears" of those bowlers as they "bursts" into "the hopeless old stone trap" of the Yorkshire valley which Ted describes. It is there, too, in the smiles with which the poem ends. Those "smiles", and

the “future” which eases open “a fraction” in the final line of the poem, reflect, too, the Cabbalistic meditation for this path, which is “Resurrection is hidden in death”¹².

Stubbing Wharf¹³ is a small mooring wharf on the edge of the town of Hebden Bridge in the Calder Valley. It lies, exactly as Ted describes it in his poem, between the Rochdale Canal and the River Calder, and it would have been a busy place during the Industrial Revolution, when Hebden Bridge was a thriving centre of the wool trade and the River Calder was known as “the hardest worked river in England” (E. ‘Notes’). By 1959, the date of events in Ted’s poem, industry had collapsed, the mills were derelict, and the whole area was, in Ted’s words, “virtually dead” (REO 8).

Hebden

In 1959, immediately after their return from America, Sylvia and Ted were staying with Ted’s parents in Heptonstall, a small village situated on the cliff which rises directly opposite the Stubbing Wharf Pub. Metaphorically, they, like Stubbing Wharf itself, were “between the canal and the river”, having left the channelled, man-made route of steady jobs and a conventional pattern of life behind them but not yet entered the uncontrolled, turbulent river of experiences to which they had decided to commit themselves. So, on a cold, rainy, winter night, they sat in a “cold and empty” pub, “shut-in” by the steep banks, dark woods and bleak moorland which still overshadow it, and contemplated their uncertain future¹⁴.

Many of the graveyard images of natural decay and disintegration which Ted evoked in his poems in *Remains of Elmet* and *Elmet*, and which can be seen in Fay Godwin’s photographs of this Calder Valley area in these books, recur in ‘Stubbing Wharfe’. Nature prevails, with wind and cold, “and rain and rain” (‘Wild Rock’, ROE 40): but in nature there is also rebirth. Sylvia, “homesick, exhausted” and miserable, was also pregnant with new life. Nothing in these surroundings, nothing in the “blackness” which seemed to engulf her, matched the fertile, sunlit, “Lawrentian globe” she had envisioned¹⁵. Yet there was hope: the “garden swelled under all [their] words” and the world where they could “start living” was all before them.

Chillingly, a “local owl”, like a messenger of the Goddess whose prophetic powers are an important part of the Mercurial energies of Hod on this Path, brings Ted and Sylvia a prophetic vision of their future ‘homes’: Ted’s in a house he had known since childhood and which he bought seven years after Sylvia’s death; Sylvia’s in a grave in Heptonstall which is, “about 300 yards from that house”¹⁶. But, for the moment, each of them had a different vision of the future and it was their immediate situation which concerned them. The judgment they needed to make at this time, and on this Path, was that between matter and spirit. They needed to learn what local people had learned in this harsh environment: that the Primal Flame can thrive in it and can even burn more strongly because of the hardships. And it was the five local bowlers – survivors like Ted’s Grandad – who helped them to see this.

These five men seemed clownishly and drunkenly “helpless” in their agony and their laughter. Repeatedly, they drank and drained their glasses, “gulping” the spirits which

filled and controlled them. They seemed like souls “tossed in hell”, but it also seemed that the agony and pain they endured “stoked” them, and produced ever more laughter. Ted’s poem ‘Singers’ (L 53; THCP 83), and his earlier poem, ‘Roarers in the Ring’ (HIR 42 - 43; THCP 38), celebrate these same, wild, enduring, life-affirming energies; as does, ‘Dick Straightup’ (L 17 - 19; THCP 63), where even the colloquial vulgarity of the title conveys the rude strength which characterizes these Yorkshire men, who seem to thrive on hardship in the “drunkenness of time”. So essential did Ted consider these energies – this Primal Fire which helps us to survive – that he ended ‘Singers’ with “a curse on the age that loses the tune”.

In ‘Stubbing Wharfe’, the energies which fill these drinkers overflow and touch Ted and Sylvia, too. And suddenly, their focus is no longer completely on their own problems. These men’s bacchanalian laughter in the face of pain and death, draws an involuntary smile from each of them. And with these smiles comes a small glimmer of enlightenment – a small easing of the darkness in the “dead-end tunnel” in which they seemed to be trapped – and glimpse of a way into the future. On this Path of Judgment, in the concept-shaping World of Briah, this was a lesson in the essential interdependence of material and spiritual energies which they needed to learn. Importantly, too, it was also a lesson about their own membership of the human race; about its fundamental unity; and about the strengths and weaknesses which they, consequently, shared.

‘Being Christlike’ (BL 153), the Judgment / Shin poem in the World of Yetzira, is a lament which is constructed with utmost care, so that its rhythms and line-breaks create emphasis and, at the same time, offer subtle variations of meaning. It is a poem full of paradox, misjudgment and error. And paradox begins with the title, which is the first of the twenty-two lines of the poem which make up one complete worldly, Malkuthian, Yetziratic journey around the Sephirothic Tree.

Sylvia’s search for wholeness and healing had begun with her first suicide. She had always considered this to be a death; and she had lain in the ‘tomb’ under the house for three days before returning to life¹⁷. In this pattern of death and resurrection Sylvia was “[b]eing Christlike”. But she “did not want to be Christlike”. Rather, she saw herself as “Lady Lazarus”, brought back from the dead to seek her own salvation, not that of others. She did not want to be Christlike and be burdened by others. But her error was to believe that she could isolate herself, even from her own “flesh and blood”, and liberate and heal herself without affecting anyone else.

Although, like Christ, Sylvia had worshipped her father and “no other” and had sacrificed everything “to be with him” so that she might find her true Poetic Self, she was not seeking to be united with her Father in Heaven, as Christ was. She was seeking to join her father “[i]n wherever he was” – in the tomb or in the Underworld – somewhere which she thought not only her body but even her family might prevent her from reaching. Here, too, her judgment was faulty, for, as Giordano Bruno wrote: “the soul is in the body in such a way that its superior part may be removed to join and attach itself to divine things as by an indissoluble vow”, corporeal concerns, therefore, “will not tyrannize

over” the poet who is truly divinely inspired any more than he or she allows them to.¹⁸

And, although Sylvia likened herself to a mystic in her poem of that title (SPCP 268 - 269), she rejected formal religion. Her faith was in herself, not in God.¹⁹ As Ted wrote in ‘Religion’ (H&W; THCP 1174), Sylvia was her “own Church”. Her religion was “Love”, but her “mythos” required the sacrifice of others; and her whole purpose was not, literally, to die but to save herself through poetic rebirth.

Sylvia did, however, set up her father as “a false god”. Ted’s phrasing in lines 19 - 21 of ‘Being Christlike’, ambiguously suggests that Sylvia rejected as a false god any god who was not her father and yet, paradoxically, the father-god she “wanted” was her own representation of her father – a product of her memory and imagination which was not, truly, Otto Plath.

As on the Traditional Tarot card, father, mother and child are present in Ted’s poem, but the necessary balance and unity between them is absent. Sylvia’s love is focussed on her father: she rejects her mother. And there is ambiguity and paradox in the lines in which Ted describes this rejection. The “stranger” who tried to “tempt” Sylvia from her father was, perhaps, Aurelia Plath: but more surely, she was Sylvia’s imagined recreation of her mother in her journal after her sessions with Ruth Beuscher (SPJ 12 Dec. 1958 - 13 June 1959), and in her poem ‘Medusa’. Yet, this “stranger” with her “great hooded eyes” is also the Moon Goddess – the “bald”, “wild”, terrible Moon which Sylvia described as “my mother” in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ (SPCP 172 - 173). This mother was not “sweet Mary”, mother of Christ, but a mother to be feared; a mother who, in Sylvia’s last poem ‘Edge’ (SPCP 272 - 273) stares chillingly from her “hood of bone”.

Ted, by the careful placement of line-breaks in his poem, emphasized the way in which this moon mother had come very close to Sylvia: “so close”, he wrote, with her moon eyes “Promising the earth you saw”, that “Your fate and you cried”. Clearly, if the meaning of poem is understood by ignoring the line-breaks, observing the punctuation, and accepting that the mother mentioned is Aurelia Plath, then it seems that Sylvia rejected Aurelia’s tempting; and reacted to the fate that she saw in Aurelia’s eyes, as if Aurelia were the Devil. Which is, perhaps, what Sylvia did do. But the careful structure of Ted’s lines offers the additional view, that Sylvia feared and rejected the Goddess’s strange world and the strange powers the Moon seemed to have over her: that she rejected Mother Nature in favour of the Father’s rational, familiar, will-driven ways.

And yet another, much more contentious, reading is possible if each line is taken to embody a discrete thought. “Your fate and you cried”, suggests a personified fate, such as the Greek Goddess, Atropos, who is one of the three weird sisters who decree the pattern of each human life. It suggests that Atropos, the Fate who inexorably decrees the moment of death, cried out at the blandishments offered to Sylvia by her sister Lachesis or Chance, whose primal energies determine the length of an individual’s life.

Such a reading might seem obscure and untenable, except that nothing in these

Birthday Letters poems can safely be regarded as unintended. And Ted's reference to the mother's hooded, moon-eyes, recalls the staring moon-mother in Sylvia's poem 'Edge', where Sylvia, herself, links death with "Greek necessity", and thus suggests the inescapable Fate, Atropos. All the Greek Fates, too, were the daughters of Themis, Goddess of Justice and Wisdom. Her final judgment on this particular Path is (like death) inescapable, but the time of arrival of both is unpredictable. And, whilst Chance, (Lachesis, the 'Drawer of Lots') may postpone death for a while, her jealous sister, Atropos, would certainly object.

So, Aurelia; the Moon-mother, Hecate; Atropos; and the mother Sylvia created in her imagination, all were rejected. Ted chose to express this rejection in the words which Christ used to reject Satan, when Satan promised Him the world (Luke 4:8), but Sylvia did not want to be self-less, like Christ. She "wanted" life and acknowledgment, and the "great love" that she yearned for in her poem 'Mystic'. But her judgment was faulty, her discrimination flawed, her god false, and her whole approach unbalanced.

Four times, Ted repeats, "you did not want to be Christlike". Like the cross on the flag of the Tarot angel's summoning trumpet, which divides the red field into four, this signifies the fourfold, Earthly, fundamental element of choice which Sylvia had in our world²⁰. But wise choices require careful judgment. And Ted's own judgment, as he wrote this poem, was that Sylvia's judgment had been fatally flawed, and her choices had been made on false premises. Christ, like any teacher who has been judged by their peers to be a Master or Magus, might have taught Sylvia some wisdom. But Sylvia was determined to find and follow her own way; and the choices she made on her journey showed, quite clearly, that she did not want to be Christlike.

The final poem on this Path, a poem which describes Sylvia's final resting-place in the material world of Assiah, is 'The Dogs Are Eating Your Mother' (BL 195 196). Still, the dogs which barked after Sylvia in 'God Help the Wolf...' (BL 26 - 27) pursue her. But now, these human dogs – the dogs of "our Academy", who were described by the Hermeticist, Marsilio Ficino, as fraudulent "philosophers" who "bark for the sake of public opinion, and bite and tear"²¹, come, in Ted's poem, like "a kind of hyena" to "pull at her remains".²²

The poem begins with a distinction between body and spirit. And Ted describes Sylvia's death in metaphors full of Cabbalistic meaning. It is apparent that he and Sylvia had climbed sufficiently high in their struggle towards the Source, for Sylvia's impetuous, impatient, premature leap from the window through which they saw its light to prove fatal. And this high 'window' was, for each of them, the well-developed, creative imagination, through which they 'saw' the images which inspired their work.

Sylvia's 'fall', on this Path of Judgment / Shin, brought her Cabbalistic journey full circle and returned her to earth. This was the second 'death', which is expected on this Path, and Ted buried her in the earth "where she fell", so that she might be reborn through Nature's cycles. Also, Sylvia's fall (like that of Icarus) was due to misjudgment of her own powers: failure to take into account her Earth-born, human frailty, and,

consequently, failure to judge carefully the timing and the delicate balance necessary for her flight. Metaphorically, as Sylvia described it in her own poem, 'Mystic', (SPCP 268 - 269), she flew so high that she was "used utterly, in the sun's conflagration". So, (metaphorically and literally) after the euphoria of success, Sylvia fell into darkness and returned to the earth.

Plath grave

For Ted, as for all Cabbalists, death is both an end and a beginning. He wrote of the earth around Heptonstall, where he buried Sylvia, as the "cradle-grave" ('Abel Cross... ' THCP 455), and the place into which everything returns for renewal – "the only future" ('Lumb Chimneys' THCP 456 - 457). So, in 'The Dogs Are eating Your Mother', Sylvia's grave is a place where children play, rather than weep. The things which the children and Ted "arrange" – things they had "carried from Appledore", as if they were Sylvia "herself" (and this 'self' suggests her spirit, not her body) – are simple, beautiful things of Nature. And Appledore (a small town in Bideford Bay on the north Devon coast) evokes in it's fruit-filled name, memories of the childhood of Earth, and of the fruit which caused the Biblical 'Fall from Paradise' of our First Mother, Eve. Appledore also, recalls the innocent and foolish hero, Sir Thomas Tom of Appledore, "The Knight whose Armour Didn't Squeak"²³, which strongly evokes childhood memories for anyone whose childhood contained the poetry of A.A. Milne (as Sylvia's and her children's certainly did²⁴).

So, death and childhood are linked in Ted's poem, which is, ostensibly, advice to his and Sylvia's children. And part of this advice is that Nicholas and Frieda should immerse themselves in Nature, far away from all the unpleasantness²⁵. But the poem is also a prayer for the release of Sylvia's spirit. And even the scavenging dogs, who "are not dogs", but people "who / will drop on all fours" to become voracious animals fighting over Sylvia's remains, are made to serve a purpose in releasing her Spirit for rebirth. They "batten" on the "cornucopia" of Sylvia's body of work, and on every material thing which was hers, including "the very soil". And the various meanings of 'soil', here suggests Plath grave defaced not only the earth around Sylvia's body but also things excremental and stained, as if nothing is too vile for these 'dogs' to swallow. Ted's pleas – "So leave her" and "Think her better" – stand out from the text, because of their careful placement. And they are reinforced by other words and phrases which, in these last lines of the poem, have the directive strength of magical commands: "Go wrap / Your head"; "Cover / Your eyes"; "Let them", the dogs, get on with their distasteful quarrels.

That Ted intended these commands at the end of this poem, on this particular Path, to have magical import, is suggested by a number of things. Firstly, by his belief in the particular, magical power of words – especially in poetry, which he once described as "one way of making things happen the way you want them to happen"²⁶. Secondly, by the fact (noted earlier in this chapter) that it was not in Ted's nature, normally, to issue commands to others. But most importantly, by the way in which the poems which immediately precede this one in the World of Assiah have laid the foundations for the Spiritual rebirth which will bring Sylvia, whole and unencumbered by ghosts or spirits,

“back into the sun” for a last judgment.

The phrase, ‘back into the sun’, is repeated twice in the final four lines of the poem.

Firstly, Ted instructs his children, himself and us, to rationally “Think her” (Sylvia) “with holy care”, into a place where final release and judgment of her Spirit can be brought about. Vultures feed on dead bodies, but they also have a long mythological association with the after-life and with judgement: The Indian Parsee community place their dead on high platforms for vultures to feed on, so that the Soul may be released. And Ted’s vulture in *Cave Birds*, is “The Interrogator” and “the sun’s keyhole” (CB 12; THCP 421)27.

Scarab

Secondly, Ted commands the use of creative imagination for this same purpose. So, the ‘dogs’ become beetles. And beetles, like the scarab beetle that lays its eggs in dung and rolls them into the sun to hatch, also have ancient symbolic and sacred associations with the Sun-god and with rebirth.

So, in these final lines, Ted carefully balanced thought with imagination. Flying like Daedalus, on stronger, more mature wings and with infinitely more care than Sylvia or Icarus had managed, he negotiated a way between the Father’s solar, rational powers and the Mother’s moony, imaginative powers, in his attempt to bring Sylvia “back into the sun” for final judgment and rebirth. At the same time, he magically commanded that the voracious mouths of the ‘dogs’ be turned into valuable, natural aids to this endeavour. They, if his magic works well, will devour the ‘shells’ in which the Truth lies concealed. So, human mouths may deconstruct, maul and gulp Sylvia’s remains28 and the ‘dogs’ of the Academy may argue, posture and “vomit / Over their symposia”, but what will eventually be revealed will be whatever fragments of timeless, eternal, universal Truth Sylvia managed to channel into her work. And on these alone will she finally be judged by her peers in our world.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Bruno, De Gli Eroi Furori. Part 2. Dialogue 1:IX.

2 All three human figures have golden hair but only the child’s resembles a swirling sun.

3. This illness took place before Sylvia made her drawings of Benidorm (see SPLH 25 Aug. 1956). So, again, the events of this poem and of the poem which immediately precedes it in *Birthday Letters*, do not conform to the actual chronological order of events. Both poems, however, conform to the requirements of the particular Cabbalistic Paths on which Ted placed them.

4. I can find no evidence that Voltaire ever had plague, although he had been a sickly child at a time when plague was rife in the country. It is relevant to this path, though, that Voltaire had responded to the sick, feverish excesses of the Roman Catholic

Church in France with excessive zeal and had become in the process like “a stone man”, governed by rationality and immune to the wonders of Nature, imagination and Spirit. It was for this lack of vision that Blake attacked him in his notes to ‘The Last Judgment’, where he wrote that Voltaire had “embraced Error and rejected Truth” (Blake, *Ibid.* p.327).

5. Burkhardt, *Alchemy*, Element Books, Dorset, 1986. p. 69.

6. The Alchemical symbol of Solomon’s Seal (a six-pointed star) unites the symbol for Water (an inverted triangle) with that of Fire (an upright triangle), to represent the balance and harmony of Love. This is also the Star of Venus.

7. In a letter to her mother (SPLH 6 Nov. 1956), Sylvia described herself as “emotionally exhausted” by stresses in her own life but also by “the Hungarian and Suez affairs”. Ted, it seems, immersed both of them in nature for relief. And Sylvia wrote that “the creative forces of nature” were the only ones which now gave her any peace, and that she and Ted wanted “to become part of them”.

8. Blake, *Ibid.* p. 46.

9. James Bone, *The Times*, 8 April 2000, 2W. p. 10. Quotation from a letter from Ted Hughes to Aurelia Plath, which is now held at Emory University.

10. *Letters to Ted*, ‘Notes’, p. 108. Daniel Weissbort, like Lucas Myers, was a close friend of Ted’s from the time they were students at Cambridge University until Ted’s death in 1998.

11. Crowley, 777, p. 34.

12. Crowley, *Gematria*, p. 25.

13. Ted consistently used the spelling ‘Wharfe’, which is also the name of another Yorkshire river and its valley just north of the Calder. Current spelling appears to be Wharf, without the ‘e’.

14. Stubbing Wharf Pub, as shown in photographs which can be found on the Internet (search ‘Stubbing Wharf + Rochdale + canal’) looks pleasantly welcoming in the sun, but it is set in a steep-sided valley and can look very dark, bleak, damp and gloomy in Winter.

15. Sylvia greatly admired the way D. H. Lawrence “bodies the world forth in his words” (SPJ 15 Sept. 1958). And Ted’s reference to ‘gentians’ so close to ‘Lawrentian globe’ suggests that Lawrence’s poem ‘Bavarian gentians’ was in his mind. In that poem, Lawrence links passion with death and he also asks for “three dark flames” (like the flames of Shin) to light the “living dark” into which he will go.

Lumb Bank

16. In his letter to the German translators, Andrea and Robert (16 June 1998), Ted noted that Heptonstall was where his mother's family had always been buried. He wrote, too, that the house he bought (Lumb Bank) "eventually became one of the centres of the Arvon Foundation", where courses are run "by writers for aspiring writers".

17. In 1956, using words which have Biblical echoes, Sylvia wrote in her journal: "Being dead, I rose again" (SPJ 19 Feb. 1956).

18. Bruno, *De Gli Eroici Furori*, Ibid. Second Part. Dialogue 1: IV.

19. In 1952, Sylvia undertook a detailed analysis of her beliefs about God and concluded that we all construct our own "absolutely real dream Kingdoms – paradoxically all 'true'" (SPJ 25 July 1952). And at Easter 1959, she wrote of "the risen Christ meaning only a parable of human renewal and nothing of immortality" (SPJ 29 Sept. 1959).

20. Four is the number of stable foundations and balance, it represents the Four Mother Elements from which every material thing is made, and so four is the number of Earth. The cross, which cuts the red field into carefully balanced quarters, represents wise choice in our world, and the whole flag is a symbol of the harmony and wholeness which careful judgment will maintain.

21. Marsilio Ficino, 'What Is Necessary For Composure In Life And For Tranquillity Of The Soul', *Book of Life*, (1489), Trans. Boer. Spring Publications, Texas, 1980.

22. How, I wonder, can I analyse this poem, when those who "batten" on Sylvia and her work are so angrily and bitterly described?. I can only hope to be one of Ficino's "legitimate philosophers" who "search for truth". And I must repeat that it is the nature of the Cabbalistic journey that each person must make it for themselves. My understanding of Ted's poems is the product of my own journey and my own fragmentary attempts to peel back some of the shells within which the Truth lies hidden. Others will read Birthday Letters quite differently. "Every story", as Ted wrote in 'Myth and Education', "is still the original cauldron of wisdom, full of new visions and new life" (WP 142). And Birthday Letters is "only a story". It is Ted's story and Sylvia's story, but, through the powers of imagination, it can also be "Your story. My story" ('Visit', BL 9). . What matters most of all, are the whole, un-"torn" poems, through which the story is told.

23. It seems, from Milne's poem, that Sir Thomas Tom was a Kentish knight, not a Devonian. Appledore in Kent, however, is not a seaside town.

24. Sylvia wrote of being "brought up in the fairy-tale world of Mary Poppins and Winnie-the-Pooh" (SPJ Dec. 1950. Journal Page 38). She also mentioned both again in 1962, at the time when she was immersed in "the loving slovenliness of motherhood"

(SPJ 1962. Appendix 15).

25. The Brooks Range is in far north Alaska, where Nicholas Hughes was living when Ted wrote this poem. The Nullarbor Plains are in Australia, where Frieda lived at that time. Both places are huge, natural wildernesses.

26. Ted Hughes. The Critical Forum . Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978. A copy of this tape is held with other Norwich Tapes in the Library of The University of Birmingham.

27. The mythological associations of Ted's Cave Birds vulture are discussed in detail in Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest, pp. 71 - 73.

28. The 'Hughes' part of Sylvia's name (the public 'face' she wore as Ted's wife) has frequently been torn from her headstone. There have been verbal and legal battles, too, about some of the ways in which Sylvia, her life, and her work, have been posthumously presented by authors, film-makers, critics and scholars.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalThe World CardTau path

The Path of The World – Tau

Tarot card 21. Tree Path 22.

Joining Sephiroth 9 (Yesod) and 10 (Malkuth).

'55 Eltisley', 'Remission', 'The Beach', 'Red'.

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Path 22, the Path of The World, is the final Path of the Cabbalistic journey. It is the Path onto which the Spiritual Child steps forth armed with all the experience, knowledge and understanding which has been gained on the earlier Paths. And it is the place of transformation, the place where all the energies which are now gathered at Yesod (9 - Foundation) are made manifest in our World through the powers of Malkuth (10 – The World).

Both Yesod and Malkuth have been discussed in detail in earlier chapters, but not as they relate to this Path. Here, the culmination of the Great Work is achieved and no

further changes become possible on this particular journey. The journeyer will either succeed in their quest, or fail. And the degree of understanding, balance and self-control which has been learned on the journey now determine the pilgrim's future, for (as always in Cabbala where death and life are a continuous process) this end is also a beginning.

Malkuth lies at the base of the central Pillar of Equilibrium at the end of Path 22 which is nearest to the Underworld. It is linked, through Yesod, to the Path of the Arrow, which flies directly up the Pillar of Equilibrium, through Tiphereth at the heart of the Tree, across the Abyss, to Kether – The Crown. There, the liberated Self (the Pure Spiritual Child) comes face-to-face with the Divine Source and direct communication is possible. The journeyer who succeeds in making this flight successfully is still human, still present in our World of Nature, and he or she becomes a Master or Magus: a healer and teacher¹.

The 'Child' which has been born of a journey in which learning has been incomplete, however, necessarily embodies impurities which make direct communication with the Divine Source (seeing the God naked, as it were) extremely dangerous. This Child should make the journey again, beginning humbly, not quite as the Fool they once were but with child-like willingness to learn. But another, terrible possibility also exists.

Enthralled by the unpredictable energies of the Moon Goddess of Malkuth, Hecate, and the dangerous powers of Saturn, the Old Father God of fertility who governs this Path, the journeyer who has gained some, incomplete, understanding but is not yet fully master of their own energies, may be tempted, as Sylvia was, to try and fly up the Path of the Arrow to the Source². Such an attempt can only end in disaster. Just as Psyche incurred the wrath of Eros and was cast out of his dream palace and out of the World for succumbing to the temptation to see his face, so those who prematurely attempt to fly to the Source plunge into the Abyss of Shells, demons and ghosts. Then, only through the mediation of others (as in the story of Psyche) are the gods placated so that the wandering spirit may re-enter the World of Nature through Saturn's Underworld and, ultimately, be reborn.

The Cabbalistic journey, which is that of the shamanic healer, the poet, the potential Spiritual Master and Magus requires the utmost patience. It also requires faith that even in the darkest places Truth and Unity do exist. And so-called 'Simple Faith' is an essential aspect of this Path. Yet to define Simple Faith, is no easy task.

Faith, it seems, is fundamental to our world-view and it may be expressed in religious, mythological, psychological, mathematical, scientific or common sense terms. At an everyday level, faith in the continuity of the material world allows us to function from moment-to-moment and faith in natural laws, whether we understand them or not, allows us to learn from experience, to predict and to plan. But for the Cabbalist, faith in some power which is the source of inner strength and guidance underpins the whole journey. Without simple faith, the Cabbalistic journey would be meaningless.

Brevary

Simple Faith, on this Path of The World is symbolized by the Hebrew letter for this Path, which is Tau. Tau, in Hebrew teaching is 'The Seal of Creation', the "impression" of God which "passes in inheritance from generation to generation, world to world". In this way, Tau links Heaven and Earth. Tau is also the Cross in which, symbolically, every Earthly thing is connected to the still point of Truth and Unity. The Cross is a symbol of faith and redemption³.

Faith is represented, too, on the Traditional Tarot card for The World. It is suggested by the symbols for the four Christian evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – whose gospels have passed the message of God from generation to generation. It is suggested, too, by the wreath of evergreen leaves which symbolize the continuity of life through Nature's cycles and the zero of completion, the Uroborus, which joins every end to a new beginning. It is there, too, in the human figure (traditionally hermaphrodite) which dances naked at the centre of it all. This figure, at the hub of this wheel of natural and supernatural life, expresses child-like joy, balance and wholeness. It is variously interpreted as the Spiritual Child, the Spirit of Nature, the Self reborn, and the position in which it dances, with arms outstretched and one leg crossed over the other, resembles that of Shiva Nataraja, Lord of the Dance, dancing in the cosmos. This Tarot figure, however, has one foot firmly planted on Earth and it is surrounded by Earthly symbols.

The Element which governs this Path is Earth. The crossed legs of the dancing figure make the Earth number, 4 – the cross of the four Elements and the number of stability. And its head and arms make a triangle, symbolizing the reflection here on Earth (in Father, Mother and newborn Spiritual Child) of the unity of the Supernal Triangle. Together, a triangle superimposed on a cross like this represent Alchemical Sulphur, the immortal Soul which is the "essential and immutable form of man" on Earth⁴. Alchemical Sulphur also (like the energies of Malkuth) confers form on the purified essence which is the final product of the Great Work, thus fixing it, as a seed of spiritual gold, in our World. Similarly, the Tarot figure of the Spiritual Child is fixed within the egg-shaped wreath of leaves, so that it is part of Nature and her cycles here on Earth. Out of the egg, into our World, will come the liberated Soul, the reborn Shaman, the Magus, the True Self.

Earth is represented, too, in all the numbers associated with this Path. The number of the Tarot card is 21, representing two whole Earthly cycles of 10, plus a new beginning at 15. The number of this Cabbalistic Path is 22, in which $2 + 2$ and 2×2 equal 4, representing Earth. And the numerical value of Tau is 400, which significantly magnifies its Earthly powers.

Like the linked and equal twos which represent the Cabbalistic Path of Tau, the title Ted chose for the first poem on this Path in the Atziluthic World also contains linked and equal numbers. "55 Eltisley" not only refers to the first home in which Ted and Sylvia lived after their marriage and their return from Spain, it also has numerical significance which is remarkably apt for Ted's Cabbalistic purposes.

5 + 5 = 10. And 10, although it is not the number of the final Path, is the number of completion and the number which gathers all the energies together in the Worldly Kingdom of Malkuth, at one end of this Cabbalistic Path. 5 is also the Tarot number of the Hierophant, the man or woman chosen by the High Priestess to channel her energies into our World. The Hierophant is one who (like the shamanic poets Ted spoke of with Ekbert Faas) has received and responded to the Goddess's call: and both Ted and Sylvia, in their driven need to be poets and in their determination to dedicate their lives to creative ends, had heard her and responded. Both, at this stage of their lives, were inspired by love, which is the source of the Hierophant's powers. And both were already successfully channelling a great deal of creative energy into their poems. Both, in effect, were Heiropphants and, in their shared poetic purpose⁶, they could appropriately be represented by the fives side-by-side in this poem's title.

'55 Eltisley' tells a story which is backed up by entries in Sylvia's journal and by letters which she wrote to her mother between 22 October 1956 and 29 May 1957. Ted's solitary move into the flat, the "few old sheets" and the "kitchen silver" which had remained there, and the "ghastly yellow" walls which Sylvia wanted to repaint (SPLH 1 Nov. 1956); the dirt she tried to scour away; the sofa; the paraffin heater; the two older women, Dorothea Krook (SPLH 24 Feb. 1957) and Wendy Christie (SPLH 18 March 1957), whose help and friendship Sylvia accepted: all find confirmation in Sylvia's letters. As do Sylvia's strong responses to world events, her longing for America (SPLH 12 March 1957), and the great elation and deep depression which accompanied each acceptance or rejection of their poems.

Ted imaginatively adds life and colour to his memories of all this in this poem, but in the light of the poem's position in the Cabbalistic journey there is another, deeper level of meaning to much of what he tells us.

On the first day of November, 1956, Ted did indeed move into the ground floor flat at 55 Eltisley Avenue, Cambridge, alone. Officially, Sylvia was expected to remain in her college room at Whitstead until December 7th when the term ended but unofficially she soon joined Ted at Eltisley Avenue. Their separation, then, was brief and not nearly as total or distant as it had been in October when, for three weeks, Sylvia was living in Cambridge and Ted was still living in London. Yet, in his poem Ted emphasized the solitary nature of his move into the flat in five lines in which he chose his words with precision. He "took possession" of the flat, "claimed it", "slept" in it "alone", he tells us: thus he performed the very first task of any careful magician by taking possession of the space which would become the home (or temple) in which he would practice his art.

Ted's art, and Sylvia's, too, of course, was poetry, but the flat in Eltisley Avenue was also the place in which the couple would cast horoscopes, consult the Tarot, and use the Ouija board to conjure the Spirit, Pan, to ask for help in choosing topics for their poems and in predicting Football Pool results. This sort of practice is, as discussed earlier in relation to the poem 'Ouija' (BL 53), a misguided and dangerous way for novices to seek contact with the Divine energies. Perhaps Ted suggests as much in '55 Eltisley' when he refers to the "emergency kit of kitchen gadgets" with which they

launched the “expedition”: for this was not just an expedition into a shared journey through life but also their shared poetic quest for wholeness and Truth.

Ted was always superstitious, so it was quite natural that he should immediately have looked for omens at 55 Eltisley Avenue. But the power he attributed to the blood which he found staining the pillow, and the detail in which he “studied” it, is rather more than simple folk-lore superstition or a ghoulish, over-active imagination might suggest or require. It is, rather, the power which magicians and soothsayers have always attributed to blood: the power of ectoplasmic materialization – the power to allow things of the spirit world to take form in our world – a power which is especially associated with the energies of Malkuth. So, in this poem, the blood on the pillow “condenses” for Ted “a miasma”, an “odour”, a “ghost”. And his investigation of its exact origin – mouth, ear or head – had the sort of importance that a soothsayer would attribute to an investigation of the entrails of a sacrificed animal.

All of this degraded, Earth-focussed, magical practice, with its reliance on tools and omens, is consistent with the still-Foolish state of those who have as yet only travelled the Paths of the Atziluthic World and still have much to learn. Especially, Ted and Sylvia had yet to understand that simple faith, rather than complicated rituals, is the way to Truth⁷. Their approach, too, was naively dangerous on this Path which is so close to the Underworld and is so open, through Malkuth, to the demons of darkness. Yet, as Ted makes clear by his reference to the Albatross in this poem, he and Sylvia were already well beyond the threshold of their poetic journey. For, although the “Antarctic seas” and the “pack-ice” make complete sense as images for Sylvia’s icy opposition to any suggestion of Ted’s contact with other women, the Albatross is best understood as that same shamanic “Keeper of the Threshold” which Ted identified in his essay on Coleridge’s ‘Ancient Mariner’ (WP 421 - 424).

Ted’s analysis of Coleridge’s poetry as a shamanic poet’s struggle to release his true Poetic Self, established ‘The Ancient Mariner’ as a description of an archetypal shamanic journey. Ted wrote of this journey as that “spirit adventure” which is “the spontaneous quest” undertaken “asleep or awake” by every soul in dire need. It is, in other words, exactly the quest, or ‘expedition’, on which he believed that he and Sylvia had embarked. So, the Albatross appears in ‘55 Eltisley’, and the couple are seen to journey, like Coleridge’s Mariner, through unknown icy-seas; to suffer “meteorological phenomena” (Sylvia’s moods swung between becalmed depression and the storms of creativity and euphoria); and to encounter “polar apparitions”. And now, on this Path of Tau (which figuratively is at the bottom of the Tree, furthest from the warmth of the Source) they have arrived at the place where the Otherworld and our own World meet, where spiritual transformation occurs and where a shamanic poet may, like the Ancient Mariner gain “strange powers of speech”.

In ‘55 Eltisley’, however, although a rainbow of promise glows in the darkness through which Ted and Sylvia plod, the conditions for true transformation are not right. Ted’s happy complacency, his willingness to accept just “a candle” for illumination, suggest the Vice of Malkuth, which is Inertia. Sylvia, too, is happy to settle for the “igloo comfort”

of a “centrally heated” Bell Jar. And the “crystal ball” at which she warms her “hands” (rather than warming her heart at the Source) shows her a comforting, ready-made, traditional, dream-scene of domestic harmony. This was a small-scale, Worldly (but also unrealistic) goal for which to aim.

In this poem, Sylvia uses her “heirloom paperweight”⁸ exactly as a magician would use a talisman in order to achieve a desired end. And once again this suggests a crude and ancient ‘kitchen-tool’ sort of magic. But, chillingly, the scene on which Sylvia focuses her energies is a vision of a Mummy and Daddy sealed off from the rest of the world in an artificial place of perpetual snow. FivesMetaphorically, as Ted suggests in the final three lines of the poem, this miniature scene did, indeed, depict their shared future. “Be careful what you wish for: it may come true”, is a warning which must be especially heeded when magic is involved.

‘55 Eltisley’, however, marks only the end of one phase of Ted’s and Sylvia’s journey. They had not yet learned to accept the material world “as it is and has to be” and to look beyond the “mirage” for the Truth. Together as the winter of 1956-7 turned to Spring, they would begin to tread the Paths in the World of Briah. And although they were now “plodding” hand in hand, female joined to male like the Alchemical King and Queen beneath the Rainbow, this newly linked couple was not the truly hermaphrodite Spiritual Child which can reach the Source. Nor could it be, since such joint enlightenment is not possible. Each, individually, would have to find the unity and balance of the Spiritual Child within themselves in order to experience their own transformation in their own time.

In ‘Remission’ (BL 109 - 110), which occupies the Path of Tau in the World of Briah, Sylvia, in her “oceanic submission” to the natural processes of birth, temporarily achieves such a transformation. Ted, in his own words, “helped her” and “saw it” happen: saw Sylvia transfigured; saw the human mother and child linked by Nature to the Source.

Once again, through the medium of Sylvia’s Indian midwife, Ted invokes the image of the Golden Chain of Homer, in which the Virgin Nature transmits the ‘Invisible Fire’ of the Source into our World through the ‘Ape of Art’. There is nothing demeaning intended in Ted’s reference to the midwife’s “monkey-fine dark fingers”. On the contrary, he makes it clear that for Sylvia this midwife was the Earth Goddess, the “deity” who brought the “yoga breath” of the Indian Mother Goddess, Ganga, to inspire and soothe her. Through her arts, Sylvia was “delivered”. And the ambiguity of Ted’s phrase “delivered you” encompasses Sylvia’s own temporary escape from “death” (which like Johnny Panic had become part of her), and the birth of her child: it suggests, also, the mediating role of the midwife, who delivers this gift of new life from the gods.

Only the identification of the midwife as Indian, and the position of the poem in the Birthday Letters sequence, which is roughly chronological, suggests that ‘Remission’ refers to Frieda’s birth in April 1960. In fact, the empty “face-mask of nitrous oxide” was part of Nicholas’s birth in 1962: for Frieda’s birth Sylvia had no anaesthetic at all.⁹ So,

Ted's statements about Sylvia's discovery of her true "joy-being" through pregnancy and birth can apply to both occasions. This "joy-being", however – this Spiritual Child briefly poised at the heart of the Natures World (like the figure on the Tarot card) – was, indeed, a "fragile" plant. It required simple faith in Nature's powers to sustain it. And although Sylvia recognized that this was the self she "loved and wanted to live with", the self beneath all the "prettily painted" shells she had so painstakingly constructed for protection since her suicide attempt, she was not yet ready, or able, to learn this lesson of submission and suspend her own Will. As her journals and letters show, she still believed that she could deliver herself from her demons by her own efforts; and Worldly success through publication of her work remained her goal.

The story Ted tells in 'Remission' is clear enough. Even the myth-loaded image of Sylvia's rescued Self launched on the Paradisal river in a "little woven vessel" – that new Self which finds its image in a "free-floating crib" – is clearly one of release and promise¹⁰. But all such potential, for Sylvia, is shown to be "already" undermined in the final lines of the poem.

What is much less clear about the poem, is Ted's reason for shaping it on his page in just the way he did. Why, for instance, did he choose to make lines 11 to 16 a separate stanza? And why, especially, are the final three lines so rudely divorced from the rest of the poem when grammar and punctuation make them the last part of the sentence begun on line 32?

There is no doubt that lines 11 to 16 state the essential and necessary kinship of Sylvia's true Self with Nature. No doubt, either, that the final three lines of the poem figuratively display death's undermining power. Yet, there are other Cabbalistic and magical reasons why Ted should have chosen to shape this poem as he did.

Since 10 represents every aspect of Worldly completion, it is appropriate that at the "kernel" of the first ten lines of the poem, Ted reveals the True Self which lies hidden under Sylvia's multi-layered Worldly persona. It is also appropriate, since 6 is the number of Venus-Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love whose energies lie at the heart of the Cabbalistic Tree, that Ted should express the natural beauty and wholeness of Sylvia's True Self in the next six separate but closely linked lines.

By adding together 10 and 6, in pattern and in the meaning of the numbers, Ted then gives us sixteen lines in which the Spiritual Child is born ($10 + 6 = 16$: $6 + 1 = 7$, the number of the Spiritual Child born into our World).

Finally, by spatially distancing the phrase "Escape incognito" from the verb "helped", to which it is linked by the grammar and punctuation of the last four lines of the poem, Ted gave that phrase the added power of an imperative. And, by invoking the magical power of 3 to support that phrase, he reinforced its imperative effect. In addition, his particular spacing of lines ensures that whenever the poem is read paying due attention to the spacing Ted chose, "As I helped you" will belong most naturally to the sixteen lines which it concludes: and the imperative effect of "Escape incognito", linked to the final

two lines, will be reinforced and (especially if it is read aloud) given continuing magical power.

What Sylvia is to escape from is clearly and carefully defined, and her incognito state ('incognito': unknown; disguised; with character and name concealed) allows death no "features" by which to recognize her again.

No change was possible in the events which Ted recounted in 'Remission', but his own journey as he wrote the Birthday Letters poems had brought him again to the final Path of the World of Briah. Here the fluid concepts and patterns so far created are those which will soon be made concrete in the World of Yetzirah. So, Ted's numerical pattern-making in 'Remissions' had special significance: and it strongly suggests that his purpose was to ensure that Sylvia's Spirit should, through the magic of this poem, be able to re-enter our World incognito and, therefore, whole again and completely free¹¹.

'Remission', however, was not the last poem of Ted's Birthday Letters journey: nor does it recount the end of Sylvia's journey all those years before. It tells only, as the title indicates, of Sylvia's brief respite from the claims of the deathly power that lodged in her and constantly threatened to destroy her. So, both journeys continued, and the next poem on the Path of Tau, now in the World of Yetzirah is 'The Beach' (BL 154 - 156).

'the Beach', set between 'Being Christlike' and 'Dreamers' in the Birthday Letters sequence, appears to refer to something which took place in November 1962. Yet, by November 1962 (the month is mentioned twice in the poem), Ted and Sylvia had separated. Ted was living alone in London and Sylvia had begun to plan her move out of Court Green in Devon. The couple did still meet, and there is no reason why they should not have shared a trip to a Devon beach, but it seems unlikely. And Ted's endeavour, in the poem, to endear England to Sylvia by showing her a "magnificent" beach seems trivial compared to the serious breakdown in their relationship at that time¹².

The actual date of events, however, is not significant, except that chronological anomalies in Birthday Letters are invariably due to Ted's deliberate positioning of poems according to their relevance to particular Cabbalistic Paths. In November 1962, Sylvia certainly "lashed for release". She was unsettled, consumed by anger and grief, and planning to get a divorce. And the differences apparent between the couple in 'The Beach', were very real for Sylvia and Ted at that time. Its symbolism of failed dreams, too, is very apt.

In particular, that was the time when, especially between 26th September and 2nd December 1962, Sylvia's poetic demon, Ariel, lashed her into an amazing, sustained surge of creativity. From the first release of Ariel in 'Elm' (SPCP 192 - 193), Sylvia responded to her demon; first slowly, then with gathering momentum until she was writing two or three superbly accomplished poems a night¹³. Sylvia's driven, instinctive need to give free rein to her poetic Self, regardless of all that was happening to her

every-day Worldly Self, is precisely captured in Ted's image of the migrating eel, driven by instinct to seek its source. But although Sylvia's poetic Self came alive as she wrote those poems and did, briefly, dance at the centre of her creative world, its dance was wild and destructive and joyless: quite unlike that of the figure on the Tarot card of The World.

Vividly as 'The Beach' conveys the failure of two people to reconcile the differences in expectations, vision and mood which exist between them, it is also a poem which demonstrates the need to discriminate between truth and illusion, dream and reality. Cabbalistically, on this Path of Tau, where Worlds meet and where the Virtue of Malkuth is Discrimination, constant vigilance and care is essential. And on this Path, too, Malkuth is the 'Gate of Death' and 'The Gate of Life', a place of endings and beginnings: it is a doorway to the Underworld through which (under Hecate's witchy moon) demons may enter our World: and it is a place of extreme dichotomies where the success or failure of the Cabbalist's journey will be determined.

A beach, as in other Birthday Letters poems, is a margin – a threshold between two worlds. Symbolically, it is a place of dichotomies – the meeting place of conscious and unconscious worlds, of life and death, dream and reality. On one side of this margin, too, is the familiar, unchangeable landscape of the past: on the other, the fluid, unknown seas of the future. Symbolically, a beach was exactly where Ted and Sylvia stood in their everyday lives and in their creative lives in November 1962.

In reality, and symbolically, Ted's poem tells of unrealistic expectations based, not on knowledge and understanding, but on visions and dreams. Both he and Sylvia had a seed of light – a "jewel" or a "crystal" – within them which drove them towards a promised land. For Sylvia, sun-drenched, sea-scoured Nauset was "some prophecy mislaid", which she yearned to recover: For Ted, it was Avalon – the Isle of Appletrees – a mythical, fertile place of enchantment and magic, to which he was tuned.

These were complementary visions. Sylvia's one of sun and sea: Ted's, dark and earthy. The mistake both make in 'The Beach' is to look for the realization of their dreams in the external, physical world. Each, too, perceives the physical world around them in a different way, viewing it according to their own experience and partial knowledge. Ted, shaped by war-scarred England, accepts dirt and drabness and restrictions as the natural state of his world. But on venturing beyond its margin (across the shifting surface of the sea) the "shock" of his first glimpse of the bright, busy, "merry-go-round" world of Manhattan jolts him out of his "utility habit"¹⁴ into a new, tentative perspective of himself and his world.

Sylvia, too, had been shaped by her past. Her American background led her to judge everything about England according to her own expectations and, therefore, to see it as funereal, "respectable", "depressionist" and devoid of "colour and light and life". She rejected all this. But capturing the vehemence and sarcasm of her rejection in his poem, Ted suggests, also, that Sylvia had glimpsed something familiar which she did not want to face, something which "darkened some darkness darker" within herself. So, she

“lashed for release”, and Ted, responding to the surface expression of her inner turmoil, knowing she needed some release and wanting to help her, unwisely sought a remedy based on his own inner vision and his own familiar dreams.

The beach Ted had once glimpsed in the distance and had invested in his imagination with all the natural beauties, energies and light which he saw close around him “gathered and crimped, tucked and crewelled / Into needlework by the cliff-top flora”, turned out to be “hopeless”. Exactly “the reverse of dazzling Nauset”. Yet, even if it had been as Ted imagined it, so strongly is our vision of the world around us shaped by habit, that Sylvia would likely have seen only flowers “such as fingers might embroider, close to death” (just as she did in ‘Finisterre’ (SPCP 169)) rather than the “brilliant original for Hilliard’s miniatures” which Ted saw.

Inertia is the Vice of Malkuth. And by the time the Cabbalist has reached this Path of Tau, in the World of Yetzirah, he or she may be deeply set in the grooves worn by habit and may lack the strength to climb from them or may choose the wrong means of doing so. Yet, by this stage the Cabbalist should have learned more than just the dangers of inertia. The illusory, mirror nature of our World and the fragmentary nature of our own view of it, must also be understood: and the ability to discriminate between Dream and Reality must be constantly exercised.

In ‘The Beach’ Ted demonstrated that he and Sylvia had not learned these lessons. And in the final four lines of the poem¹⁵ he revealed his own glimpse of the Cabbalistic Truth about our World. The Truth which he saw when he approached the sea, is that the “dream face” and the “suds” are but two aspects of the same whole: two “mirages”, as he called them in ‘55 Eltisley’, where he also declared one mirage to be “no worse than the other”. He saw that our fallen World is “the world as it is and has to be” and that, in the words of Hermes Trismegistus, which are fundamental to the practice of Alchemy and which apply equally to Cabbala:

In truth without doubt, whatever is below is like that which is above; and whatever is above is like that which is below: to accomplish the miracle of one thing.

Yet, although our vision of the World may be distorted and we live closed up in ourselves seeing “all things thro’ narrow chinks of [our] cavern”, as Blake declared (MHH 14E), beneath our feet lies the Earth into which we must fall and from which new life emerges. This is no illusion: this is “the real”. And in the ‘base matter’ of our bodies, too, lies that same creative spark of life that is the Divine Spark, the crystal or jewel in our heads. We must have simple faith in its existence and in its power to guide us; and we must have the will to face our own darkness in order to unearth it. Unless we do, there is no fixed point by which to judge and understand our world and our actions: and without it, we will never reach that still point where all contraries are reconciled.

Sylvia could not do what Ted did when he wrote those last four lines of ‘The Beach’.

She could not see that her dream-world of Nauset was but the flip side of a single whole, the other side of which was her own dark vision of the external world. More importantly, she failed to understand that what she refused to approach, what she cut herself off from when she “sat behind [her] mask, inaccessible”, was a reflection of her

own inner darkness. And that until she did walk towards that darkness (as Ted says in the poem that he did) and accepted those energies for what they really were, she would never learn to control them.

Sylvia's fine essay, 'Ocean 1212-W' (JPBD 117 - 124) was written after her poetic attempt to fly to the Sun on Ariel, and only a few weeks before her death¹⁶. In it, she acknowledged that no English beach could ever satisfy her "nostalgia" for her "ocean childhood" and that her "vision" of regaining it was "beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine white flying myth". She wrote of the sea as if it were her natural element: its light had been her "watery cradle"; she had swum in it by instinct; and she was devastated when she thought it had rejected her, and longed for "a sign of election and specialness" from it. She knew its violence was monstrous but it thrilled and attracted her. But she associated it, too, with her first knowledge of the "separateness of everything" [her emphasis]. And, in a phrase which echoes with bleak finality, she wrote that with that knowledge, her "beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over".

Whether this despairing statement reflected a long-held lack of faith in ever regaining wholeness, or whether it was only the result of Sylvia's recent failure to reach the Source on Ariel, it is impossible to say. But Ted certainly believed that Sylvia's struggles to rewrite 'Sheep in Fog'¹⁷ were driven by a return of her old demons, which he detected "stirring again here more frighteningly than ever" (WP 210). He saw, in her revisions, a melting of the "the 'Phaeton myth'", which had been behind Ariel, into "the Icarus myth", in which she would fall into a heaven the opposite of that towards which she had originally flown. This heaven, now ("and in her last eleven poems"), was "starless" and "fatherless". It was "a dark water" like that of her "monstrous" world-destroying sea in 'Ocean 1212-W'.

Sylvia's feelings about the sea, it seems, were deeply ambivalent. Which is perhaps why it was not the cool, sea-lit blue of Nauset which was her favourite colour, but the warm, earthy, dramatic colour, red.

'Red' (BL 197 - 8) is the final poem on the Path of Tau in the World of Assiah; the final Path of Ted's Cabbalistic journey; and the final poem in Birthday Letters. As such, it has particular importance. And Ted, in any case, always chose the final poem in his published sequences with particular care. "I have a superstition", he said in his Critical Forum reading in 1978, "that the writer, even more than the reader, is affected by the mood and the final resolution of his poem in a final way... the poem stands there, permanent, vivid and powerful and tries to make him continue to live in its image".

Why, if this was Ted's belief, would he choose to end Birthday Letters with a poem steeped in red, when he "felt it raw – like the stiff gauze edges / Of a stiffening wound"? Why end, finally, on a note of loss, and risk confirming and prolonging a mood of sorrow and regret which was already very real for him? And why, when there was so much he could have said to sum up the good things he wanted Sylvia to be remembered for, did he choose to end this sequence by memorializing such a seemingly trivial thing as her favourite colour?

It is true that red is a symbol for many of the qualities Sylvia possessed. True, too, that there is ample evidence in Sylvia's writings that she was, as she put it, very "susceptible to colour and texture" (SPLH 5 Nov. 1961) and that she liked to surround herself with red. It is also true that, for Sylvia, there was nothing trivial about her loss of the blue "jewel" of Nauset and the childhood wholeness she had always associated with it. This loss lay behind all her creative endeavours and, so, is suitably encapsulated in Ted's final line. But the mood of 'Red' is "downbeat"¹⁸, sombre, defeated. Almost everything around Sylvia, and everything she does, is steeped in blood and associated with death, wounds, judgment and sacrifice. Each lightening of mood is short-lived and ends in more blood, defeat and "weeping". Even the seven lines which convey the "kindly spirit" of blue, end in "the pit of red"; and that "jewel" of blue is finally, irrevocably "lost".

In the Cabbalistic framework of Birthday Letters, this 'downbeat', ghoulish mood, caused by an imbalance between red and blue in Ted's poem, seems to go against everything he has tried to convey in this sequence about the essential need for balance in any Cabbalistic journey. Yet, this imbalance reflects precisely the imbalance which existed in Sylvia throughout her journey. And the Cabbalistic imagery in this poem is strong.

Colours, and the harmonic vibration of colours (which scientists call wave-lengths), are an aspect of the harmonic unity of the Source. Light was separated from darkness at the creation of our World. Its colourless luminosity is represented by Kether (Sephira 1), at the apex of the Cabbalistic Tree, and from it all colours derive. Red and blue, at the highest (ideal) level of the Tree, belong to the Sephiroth Binah (3) and Chokmah (2). Red, here, is the transparent crimson of blood; blue is that of the sky. Lower down the Tree, in the illusory, mirror world of Nature, red and blue are reflected in the Sephiroth Gevurah (5) (where red is the red of fire) and Chesed (4) (where blue is the blue of water).

So red and blue, as depicted on the Cabbalistic Tree, are at opposite sides and represent the two extremes of the visible spectrum of light.

Red, on the Pillar of Justice, is associated with the Female and (as it is in Ted's poem) with passive "congealments", "stiffening" wounds, "crusts": it is blood which, linked to Chokmah by the energies of Tiphereth (6) at the heart of the Tree, is the vehicle of the vital Spirit which activates the body. Red, is the colour of Earth, which is represented in Ted's poem by the mineral, red-ochre, and its crystalline form, haematite. And the red of Gevurah is also fiery, powerful, warlike, judgmental and severe, just as Sylvia was in her Ariel poems.

Blue, on the Pillar of Mercy, is the "kindly spirit" which is "a guardian, thoughtful". Blue is airy, Mercurial, and Venusian, it "electrifies", loves and protects.

And white (Sylvia's next "favourite" colour) is, in our lower World of Nature, the reflection of the luminosity of Kether. In the words of the 17th Century Jewish mystic, Jacob

Böhme, white is “The son of God” who “shines in the sea of Nature”. White is the reflected colour of Wholeness, Unity and Truth. And white is the colour of the “heirloom bones” of spiritual wisdom which, on this Path of Tau, are passed from one generation to the next¹⁹.

In Ted’s poem, we are told that both red and white were Sylvia’s favourite colours. But although Sylvia yearned for wholeness and Truth, in this poem she symbolically protects herself from white’s frightening “bone-clinic” starkness by obscuring it or by hiding herself from it with red. In ‘The Beach’, this same fear of facing the Truth led her to refuse to get out of the car and approach the sea; but her inertia there, was very different to the compulsive behaviour she exhibits in ‘Red’. And from the very beginning of this poem, by associating Sylvia’s actions with magical minerals²⁰ and bloody rituals, Ted creates a hellish atmosphere of demonic possession. It seems as if, by choosing to surround herself with red, Sylvia became enthralled by its energies. And, indeed, at the level of Malkuth, on this path of Tau, red is the colour of Saturn, the Devil and “the pit”, and of the Moon Goddess in her manifestation as Hecate or Hag, with her moon-magic and witchcraft.

White, too, is a Moon Goddess’s colour, but it is that of chaste Diana, who presides at Yesod at the opposite end of the Path to Malkuth. In her poem ‘Magi’ (SPCP 148) Sylvia associated white with “the Good, the True”, but she thought its blank purity “Loveless as the multiplication table”. And it was the pure, chaste Goddess’s face which she saw “white as a knuckle” in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ (SPCP 172 - 3) and that same Goddess’s face, in its “hood of bone” which she imagined “staring” impassively at the dead woman and children in her last poem, ‘Edge’ (SPCP 272 - 3). This was the moon “mother” Sylvia feared but for whom, in her tender, loving manifestation as “Sweet Mary” she also yearned.

Sweet Mary, the Mother Goddess who is also Isis and Ganga, was the Goddess Sylvia came so close to in ‘Remission’. She is the Goddess who manifests beyond Yesod on the Pillar of Equilibrium, at Tiphereth – the heart of the Tree. And it was her blues in which Sylvia “folded” herself during pregnancy and which, with their Mercurial energies seem to have “electrified” her and lifter her on blue “wings” from the “pit of red”.

Yet blue, in Sylvia’s writings is rarely a gentle colour. She associated it with “the blue sisters” who separated her from her father (‘The Beast’ SPCP 134); with the “cold, planetary” light of “the mind” (‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’); but, especially, she associated it with the “blue volts” of her electroconvulsive treatment – with the “blue-tongued” angels of Johnny Panic.

So, Sylvia chose red and allowed its energies to predominate in her life and in her poems. Cabbalistically, on this Path of Tau she lost her courage and her vision and, therefore, failed to reach Tiphereth and, beyond that, the Wholeness of Kether. Ted’s poem describes and reflects the imbalance which Sylvia exhibited at the end of her journey. But it does more than that. It begins with ‘red’ and ends with ‘blue’, thus rejoining these energies across the body of the poem in which Sylvia’s essence is

contained. In this way, Ted magically created for Sylvia the possibility of a new beginning.

Yet this was not the only way Ted worked poetic magic in 'Red'. With careful Alchemy, he also completed the process he began in 'The Hands', whereby he brought Sylvia out of the Underworld, dealt with the ghosts, spirits and demons which had tormented her, and, in 'The Dogs...', prepared for her to be brought "back into the sun". Each poem on the seven Paths which lead to this final Path of Tau in the World of Assiah represented one step towards returning Sylvia to our World in such a way that she might begin a new journey completely free from any former hindrances. Finally, in 'Red', Ted began the digesting process of Calcination which is the first step of any new Alchemical journey²¹. And he did so by joining Red Sulphur and Blue Mercury with the prima materia of Sylvia's blood and bones in the Athanor (or womb) of his poem.

Thus the Uroborus of Nature eats its tail. And Ted, using poetry, Cabbala, Alchemy and every other skill at his disposal, completed the circle, bringing the journey of Birthday Letters to an end in such a way that he and Sylvia might each have a new beginning.

When Birthday Letters was finished, Ted wrote to a friend that he felt "the sensation of inner liberation, a huge, sudden possibility of new inner experience"²². And to Keith Sagar, he wrote: "I suddenly had free energy I hadn't known since Crow. Which went into Ovid, then Oresteia, Phaedra maybe - and parts of Alcestis".

Suddenly, he was dancing at the centre of his world, like the figure on the Tarot card. And he attributed his "renewal" directly to his creation of Birthday Letters. "Any traumatic event", he wrote " – if writing is your method – has to be dealt with deliberately. An image has to be looked for – consciously – and then mined to the limit: but not in Autobiographical terms"²³.

The image Ted chose was that of spiritual rebirth, and he found it in Alchemy, Tarot, Cabbala, myth and legend, but he found it most truthfully in Nature. It was an image which he had 'mined' all his creative life. But not until Birthday Letters had he been able to bring together enough knowledge, understanding and poetic power to create the healing magic which freed him and made the last months of his life "totally his own"²⁴.

Falcon

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. In the spiritual fable, The Conference of the Birds, which Ted knew well, the birds which reach this point in the journey and are able to draw aside the veil and come face-to-face with the Simurgh (the Divine Source), discover that they and the Simurgh are one and the same being. That the Divine is within them.
2. Sylvia's poem 'Ariel' (SPCP 239 - 240), in which she makes herself "the arrow" which flies to the sun, describes her poetic attempt to do just this.

3. Reish, The Mystical Significance of Hebrew Letters. (<https://www.inner.org/TAV.htm>)

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4. Burckhardt. Alchemy, p. 140.

5. The dancing figure of the Spiritual Child, like the Magician / Magus on card number 1 at the start of the journey, holds a baton or wand denoting supernatural power . On the Traditional card the figure holds a wand or baton in each hand to suggest its superior balance and power, but in many packs only one baton is shown.

6. Sylvia wrote at this time of the “identical aims and expectations of our lives” (SPLH 9 Jan. 1957.

7. By the time Ted wrote Birthday Letters he did understand this. Earlier, in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, he had written of the kind of simplicity which is beyond words - simplicity which is “closest to the dumb speech of action” - inspired simplicity which “is the locked-up word of Divine Truth”. (SGCB 278).

8. Such an inheritance is material, lightweight and insubstantial rather than spiritual.

9. In her letter to her mother on 1 April 1960 (SPLH), Sylvia wrote of her Indian midwife and of having had “absolutely no anaesthesia” for Frieda’s birth. Her letter to her mother on 18 Jan. 1962 (SPLH), describes Nicholas’s birth and the empty gas cylinder.

10. Since the earliest times, in myths and legends all around the world, there have been stories of a part-Divine baby being set afloat in a reed basket in order to escape death. Joseph Cambell, for example, refers to the stories of Sargon (c. 2350 BCE), Greek Erichthonius, Hindu Vyasa and Hebrew Moses (The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology, Penguin, London, 1980. p. 73).

11. Rebirth of the Spirit in a different body (as the Dali Lama is reborn, for example) would achieve this.

12. It seems likely that the events Ted describes in ‘The Beach’ actually took place in November 1961 or in some month other than November. Sylvia’s poem ‘Whitsun (SPCP 153 - 154) describes a similar unsatisfactory beach visit and is dated 14 Feb. 1961.

13. Ted’s account of this in ‘Sheep in Fog’ (WP 191 - 211), based on Sylvia’s dated manuscripts, notes that after December 2 “she wrote nothing at all for two months” (WP 191), only revising ‘The Eavesdropper’ on December 15. He also noted that the poems Sylvia wrote when she began again in January 1963, were “very different in mood” (WP 192).

14. The ambiguity of ‘habit’ suggests the inertia which is the Vice of Malkuth and also the clothing of one who, like a monk, lives in a drab, masking garment which he wears like a useful, ‘utility’ shell. ‘Utility’, too, is a word Ted uses here with nice ambiguity:

Utility clothing was introduced in England during the war, it was mass-produced, and it complied with a minimum standard of durability and style.

15. These four lines are separated from the rest of the poem for emphasis but also because the number four is the number of Earth, the Element of this Path. Four also represents the Cross of Tau and the four limbs of the dancing Tarot figure.

16. In a letter dated 26 Dec. 1962, Sylvia told to her mother that the piece had been commissioned. On 4 Feb. 1963, she wrote that she had “done it” (SPLH).

17. This poem was written with the other Ariel poems but Sylvia returned to it again on 28 Jan. 1963.

18. In his Critical Forum recording, Ted used the words “downbeat” and “upbeat” to describe the moods of his poems. He aimed to end any sequence of poems in an “upbeat” mood.

19. In Cabbalistic tradition, the Sephirothic Tree represents the body of the primal man, Adam Cadmon, and each Sephiroth and Path corresponds to a particular body part. In Crowley’s compilation of such correspondences, the Path of Tau is associated with the bones. (777 p. 6).

20. Red-ochre, perhaps because of its blood red colour, has been used in burials and other ritual practices since Palaeolithic times. Haematite, too, has a long history of use in funeral rituals and for protective amulets and magical healing.

21. On one copy of the note which Ted sent to his publishers about changes to the contents of Birthday Letters, he added the poem ‘The City’ (THCP 1179 - 1180) as the final poem. The poem does not suit this final Path and he changed his mind about this inclusion before publication. ‘The City’ was first published as poem number eight in the sequence of eleven poems in Howls and Whispers.

22. From a letter which Ted wrote to a friend and which was read by Frieda Hughes at the Whitbread Prize award ceremony. Quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald, 28 Jan. 1999.

23. Letter to Keith Sagar 18 June 1998.

24. Letter from Carol Hughes to AS (8 November 1999). The actual publication of Birthday Letters, just ten months before Ted died, finally gave him this feeling of total freedom.

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Howls & Whispers: The Averse Sephiroth and the Spheres of the Qliploth.

An analysis of Ted Hughes' use of Cabbala in Howls & Whispers.

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Wisdom

Howls & Whispers 1:

'Paris 1954': Malkuth.

'Religion': Yesod.

Howls & Whispers 2:

'The Hidden Orestes': Hod.

'The Laburnum': Netzach.

'The Difference': Tiphereth.

Howls & Whispers 3:

'The Minotaur 2': Gevurah.

'Howls and Whispers': Chesed.

Howls & Whispers 4:

'The City': Daath.

Howls & Whispers 5:

'Moon-Dust': Binah.

'The Offers': Chokmah.

'Superstitions': Kether.

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Howls & Whispers: The Averse Sephiroth and the Spheres of the Qliploth.

H & W title page "Whoever uses the Tree as a magical system must perforce know the Spheres of the Qliploth, because he has no option but to deal with them". Dion Fortune¹.

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In all Ted's work, from the earliest times, his firm belief in the magical power of poetry

included an awareness that the energies aroused in (or evoked by) a poem can have both positive and negative effects. He stated this belief quite openly in 1971, when he discussed 'Hawk Roosting', his two jaguar poems and (in particular) his poem 'Gog', with Ekbert Faas (UU 199). He spoke of it again, in 1978, when he introduced a reading of some of his poems for the Critical Forum recording². And he would have been especially aware of this fact whilst writing the Birthday Letters poems, for he knew that in Cabbala, as in Hermeticism and magic, "everything is connected to everything else", and the whole purpose of Cabbalistic ritual is to "not only represent, but also to call forth the divine life manifested in concrete symbols" and "to transmit to this transcendental essence ... an influx of energy"³.

Such calling forth and empowerment of the energies is, as the Jewish scholar of Cabbala, Gersolm Scholem wrote, the "magical aspect" of Cabbalistic ritual. And practising Cabbalists and magicians are constantly reminded that "It is a sound magical maxim not to invoke any force unless you are equipped to deal with its Averse aspect" (MQ 284). So Ted, who had experienced for himself the powerful energies called forth by poetic symbols, and who (as the poems and structure of Birthday Letters show) practiced his Cabbalistic, poetic rituals with the utmost care, took special care to deal with the Averse energies of the Cabbalistic Tree. All of his mature experience, knowledge and understanding went into the creation of Birthday Letters, and, perhaps, until this late stage of his life he did not feel equipped to deal with the Averse energies to which he would be exposed on this journey⁴. But in the eleven poems of Howls & Whispers, which he published as a limited edition, quite separate from Birthday Letters, there is clear evidence that Ted deliberately recognized and worked with the Averse energies of each Sephira in turn.

Apart from the evidence which can be found in the individual poems of Howls & Whispers, several aspects of the book and its publication confirm this. Most significantly, there are eleven poems in the sequence, and eleven is "the general number of magic" and is regarded by Cabbalists as an especially powerful 'master' number which, in ritual practice, is never reduced by adding its digits together⁵. Eleven, too, is the number of the Averse (Infernal) Sephira, the "accursed shells"⁶ or Spheres of the Qlippoth, which exists like an ever-present shadow in our material World of Assiah. The Spheres of the Qlippoth, comprise the unbalanced, destructive energies of the ten Sephiroth of the Cabbalistic Tree, encircled by the energies of Samael, 'The Angel of Poison and Death', who, thus, makes the eleventh Averse Power⁷.

The number of copies of Howls & Whispers offered for sale – one hundred and ten – also has magical significance. The digits 110 represent the combined powers of 11 and 10 and 1 and 0; and the whole number represents the powers of 11 multiplied tenfold⁸.

In Cabbalistic texts, there are many different 'pictures' of the Averse tree and the Spheres of the Qlippoth. All agree, however, that these Averse energies are the result of imbalance or lack of control, in which one kind of energy, unchecked by others, becomes "over-active or over passive, creating frenzy on one side and grinding resistance on the other"⁹. The Averse energies are part of our world of change and they

cannot be destroyed but Cabbalists agree that they are an essential, and even valuable, part of the whole, for, as William Blake proclaimed, “Without Contraries is no Progression” (MHH Plate 3). Like the Chinese symbol of Yin and Yang, there is always a seed of light in the deepest darkness and a seed of darkness in the brightest light, and without this there could be no change, no growth, no renewal. Samael /Satan, Prince of the Spheres of the Qlipoth and ‘Prince of Death’, is also Lucifer, The Light Bearer; and the task of the experienced Cabbalist is to “call forth” that divine spark within the Averse energies of each Qlipothic shell and reunite it with the other energies so that balance and ‘right order’ are restored and a new beginning can be made..

A Cabbalist’s work, like that of a shaman or an Hermeticist (Ted has been called both), is founded on the belief that “Nothing is separate in Creation, nothing can operate on its own, because all is One” (AKT 237). So, although the symbols with which a Cabbalist chooses to work may have personal significance (as they do in *Howls & Whispers*), the energies they embody are universal. The magical effect of the Cabbalist’s ritual, therefore, will be universal.

In *Howls & Whispers*, Ted takes the Path of Wisdom (which is also the Path of the Serpent) and ascends the Sephirothic Tree from the lowest sphere of Malkuth (10) to Kether (1), at its crown, visiting each Sephira in reverse order to that in which the Lightning Flash from the Divine Source transmits its energies down the Tree.

This Path of Wisdom is taken, voluntarily or involuntarily, by every human being who becomes aware of their spiritual self. It is the route from the vegetative existence of Natural Man, who exists at the lowest extremity of the Cabbalistic Tree, to self-awareness, self-development and, for some, full spiritual awareness and growth. It represents the first steps of the ascent of Jacob’s Ladder, which extends from Earth to Heaven and which may bring the few who continue to climb it to union with the Divine Source. As such, the Path of Wisdom is the Way by which the Divine Spark (which lies like an ember in coal) may be kindled within the darkest matter and nurtured until it burns with a steady flame. It is the appropriate Path therefore, for a Cabbalist who intends to deal with the Qlipothic energies, and it also provides a traditional, protective, ritual framework within which to do this.

Malkuth

‘Paris 1954’

(H&W, 1, THCP 1173).

Malkuth: Sephira 10: The Kingdom: The Gate.

Element: Earth.

Qlipothic Sphere of Lilith.

Virtue: Discrimination.

Vice: Avarice. Inertia.

Illusion: Materialism.

Qlipoth: Stasis. Inertia.

In 'Paris 1954', Ted looks back across time from a different plane of experience and understanding and sees himself again as vegetative Natural Man, immersed in the Kingdom of Malkuth, which is the marginal, material world - 'Gateway of Life' and 'Gateway of Death' – in which we all live. Once again, as at the start of his Birthday Letters journey, he is The Fool – an un-wise innocent, totally absorbed by bodily, sensual pleasures. He sees himself on the margins of an unfamiliar culture, in a strange place, and ready to step blindly off into a new life, unaware of a danger which, in his youthful, inexperienced state, he “could never imagine”¹⁰.

The Qlippoth of Malkuth is inertia, sloth, and the sort of lack of discrimination between truth and illusion which allows us to value and cling to material things and be seduced by “Pomps and Pageants”¹¹. For Ted, “that moment” in Paris in 1954, when he tasted “that wine” and chewed “that cheese”, swamped his judgment to the extent that for “the rest of his life” he clung to the illusion that it was possible to “recapture the marvel”.

Unlike “the first peach [he] ever tasted” in 'Fulbright Scholars' (BL 3, THCP 1045) (the Birthday Letters poem in which he is similarly on the brink of a new life), there is no suggestion in 'Paris 1954' that he learned anything from his new experience: no hint, as there was in 'Fulbright Scholars', that he gained any understanding of his own “ignorance of the simplest things”. Instead, Ted looks back at his earlier self and sees how easily he was seduced by his senses; how vulnerable he was to the overwhelmingly sensual experience of falling in love; and how this led to the horrors which later beset him.

In Cabbalistic demonology, it is Lilith, the Evil Woman, who rules the darkness of Malkuth. First, as a beautiful woman she enchants and seduces the unwary: later she changes into a black demon. Essentially, however, she is the manifestation of the Goddess as Hag, Death Goddess, Queen of the Night; and her creature, like that of Dionysus, is the panther, or any other of the big cats.

As it happened, Sylvia, who was already a priestess of the Goddess in her poetic role, chose to evoke the Panther in her pursuit of Ted. There is no evidence to suggest that Sylvia saw herself as a priestess of the Goddess at that time, or that the panther in her poem 'Pursuit' (SPCP 22 - 23) was anything more than an instinctive, dramatic and appropriate symbol of her emotional state, but in Ted's mature view of poetic symbols it brought with it powerful energies. And, by dedicating that poem “to Ted Hughes”, as Sylvia did in her journal (SPJ 27 Feb. 1956), she magically linked that power with him and, so, brought it into his life.

In 'Paris 1954', the Panther / Lilith is the source of the scream which will devour Ted's “soul”¹². But this scream had been heard before in Ted's work as the outrage and pain of desecrated Nature, and as her summons to the unawakened Soul of a chosen being who is blind to his own roots and to the chaos and horror he causes and allows. It is there in the genesis of Crow¹³, that amoral, soul-less bundle of energy which Ted said was “created by God's nightmare's attempt to improve man” (UU 206). It begins the

“Alchemical Drama” of Cave Birds¹⁴, where it presages the summoning of the protagonist to judgment (or, as in the Exeter drafts: “The (protagonist) hero, in the decent piety of his innocence, is surprised. What has he failed to take account of?”). And, it became the “thousands, millions of cries - wailings, groans, screams” of the Iron Woman, a sound which disturbed Ted so much that he put off writing the story for more than a decade¹⁵.

Nature’s summons is described by Robert Graves as the call of the Goddess who, “the longer her hour is postponed and therefore the more exhausted by man’s irreligious improvidence the natural resources of the soil and sea become, the less merciful” will she be. And the judgment meted out by Graves’s Goddess is every bit as vengeful and bloody as the horrors Ted describes in ‘Paris 1954’.

For Ted, as for Graves, the Goddess’s summons was an imperative which no true poet could ignore. But the young man Ted watches in ‘Paris 1954’ is naively unprepared for the total surrender she will demand and the dreadful punishment she will inflict. Nothing in the material world which so enchants him, warns him of the extremes to which the Goddess “now in the likeness of a girl” will soon expose him. She is the gatekeeper of Hell, but that same gate also leads to Heaven. And, although she lies between him and ‘The Creator’ like the Red Coiled Stooping Dragon of the Apocalypse, it is her summons which awakens his soul. If he responds to her call, it will be her judgment and the “penalties” she imposes (her tests and “nuclear fires”) which will burn away the impurities within him, free his spirit, and set it on the Path of Wisdom.

Ted’s poem encompasses the extreme depths of the energies of Malkuth and the terrible power of illusion that sensual pleasures can have over us. Illusion can be so strong that the most bloody, terrifying and deadly things seem acceptable and even desirable: seem not just like happiness and hope, but, as they do to the young man in ‘Paris 1954’, like “all happiness” and “all hope”. This is the sort of illusion which allowed Ted’s naïve, unaware Cave Birds hero to feel “brave and creaturely” and invulnerable, despite the grisly horrors all around him¹⁶. This, too, is the world in which we pursue our own pleasures, whilst the most terrible events fill our TV screens and newspapers.

Yet how else could we go on living? “What should a man do but be merry?”, asks Hamlet, struggling against despair (H.III: ii: 132). Laughter and hope, as in the very lines of Ted’s poem, bring a glimmer of light into the darkness: and the human spirit reaches towards that light, or despairs and dies.

But laughter and hope, too, can be deceptive. And to believe that our lives can be all happiness and all hope is a foolish illusion. So, if we are to achieve harmony and peace, we must strive for discretion and balance.

In the penultimate lines of ‘Paris 1954’, Ted presents the two extremes of the energies of Malkuth. And his own experience of the horrors to which these extremes led him, gives the lines powerful emotional force. ‘A scream’ fills the first line; the illusion of it’s “Sounding like all happiness” and “all hope” fills the third; but balanced between them is

the active reaching towards harmony, the “trying to sound like laughter and hope”, which is the real spark of light buried in the scream.

Ted’s final line, spoken from his mature state of understanding, awareness and experience as he wrote the poem, is set on its own to emphasize its importance. As a mature, fully conscious Cabbalist, Ted would have immersed himself in the energies of Tiphereth, at the heart of the Tree, in order to see everything with clarity. Tiphereth’s energies integrate the whole person; and one who meditates, fully conscious at Tiphereth, and knowingly observes himself, is known as ‘The Watcher’. Ted chose the tense of the verb in the final line of his poem very carefully, for, as the Watcher, he understood that his younger self was still part of him, not just in memory but for as long as his body responded to sensual pleasures and his mind responded to hope.

And so it is for all of us. Constant watchfulness is necessary if we wish to learn discretion and avoid the illusions that our senses lead us into. Such is the teaching of Cabbala, and of most other spiritual disciplines. In the Bible, St Matthew’s Gospel exhorts us to “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation”, but also acknowledges the difficulty of this, for “the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). And Shakespeare’s Hamlet, having learned from experience that few people want their comfortable, pleasurable illusions shattered by the harsh light of truth, puns bitterly on ‘dear’ and ‘heart’ as he accurately describes our common situation:

Why let the stricken deer go weep,
the hart ungalled play,
For some must watch, while some must sleep,
So runs the world away.

(Hamlet: III: ii. 287)

Yesod

‘Religion’

(H&W 2, THCP 1174).

Yesod: Sephira 9: Foundation.

Element: Aether.

Planet: Levanah (The Moon).

Qlippothic Sphere of Gamaliel.

Virtue: Independence.

Vice: Idleness.

Illusion: Security.

Qlippoth: Zombeism. Possession.

Yesod and Malkuth both occupy the Seventh Infernal Palace of the Averse Tree. Yesod, ruled by the Moon, is full of fluid energies. It is a place of change and illusion, and the Moon Goddess may manifest here as Hecate, Selene or Diana. Her enchantments, now, are particularly dangerous, because Yesod is the Sphere in which her magic affects both the body and the mind; and Yesod is the Foundation, the place where the personal identity (or Ego) is formed.

Only through Yesod can the branches of the Upper Tree be reached from Malkuth. It is the interface, the conduit for the energies to and from the Upper Tree, and the secret door to the imagination and to all the mind's instinctive, intuitive, subconscious and psychic powers. As such, it is known as 'The Treasurehouse of Images'.

The Qlippoth of Yesod is Possession, and its Illusion is security. Colin Low¹⁷ notes that the illusion of security is often closely associated with personal identity and values: this gives a "warm, secure feeling of knowing what is right and wrong". Threats to that illusion can so easily cause feelings of "existential terror" and panic, that the ego will use "any beliefs which give it the power to retain its identity, uniqueness and integrity". He notes, too, that "religious, political or scientific ideologies" are particularly powerful for this purpose.

In 'Religion', Ted describes the darkest, most unbalanced aspects of Sylvia's Yesodic self. This was her Foundation - a personal identity formed since childhood, expressed in her "childhood's / Diaries", and based on her "mythos" of "Love" and "sacrificial murder".

The Qlippoth of Possession governs Sylvia, who is possessed by love. It is her "religion", but it is a devouring, one-sided "hunger" to possess her loved ones completely. This is love at the primitive level of Crow, whose 'Lovesong' (C 88 - 9. THCP 55-6) describes a greedy, self-serving, horrible and destructive feast.

And there is another Yesodic, Qlippothic perversion of love in Ted's 'devouring' imagery in 'Religion'. It derives from the traditional identification of Yesod with the human generative organs. And it reflects the neurotic fears of the Yesodic male, who, fearful of woman's sexual power over him, created the illusory, imaginative image of the castrating 'toothed vagina': the devouring, deadly 'mouth' which is a motif in many primitive mythologies.

In Sylvia's "church", where love entails "inexorable murder" and "Murder is of a piece / With the mouth", it is Sylvia's words which bite and tear and destroy life. "Roots", "seeds", "eggs" are all devoured; "hearts" (with wonderful paronomasia) are "bitten into" and bitten in two. Words, as Sylvia understood very well when she wrote her poem about them shortly before her death (SPCP 270), can be "Axes", and she had often used them as such. But her intention had been to find healing and wholeness: to destroy in order to re-create. The words with which she "killed" her mother (in *The Bell Jar*, in 'Medusa' (SPCP 224 - 225) and in her journals) and her father (in 'Daddy' (SPCP 222 - 224), for example), were part of a deliberate psychological "cleansing": an attempt to come to terms with the terrors of rejection, guilt and panic which she associated with "people I love", as her journal notes of meetings with her psychologist, Ruth Beutscher, show¹⁸. So, in this sense, her words and the saliva which allowed her to utter them were both killing and healing: a "scream of love" and a "chrism of love".

The final stanza of 'Religion' sums up the mental and physical parameters of Sylvia's Yesodic self. It links fixed mental fervour and an extreme and distorted illusion of self

with the real, bodily expression of passion. Heaven becomes a construct of the mind's mythos and, in the framework of Sylvia's religion, love is self-orientated, perverted and deadly – all the Qliphothic aspects of love. But the poem ends with Sylvia's active, physical expression of that passion, expressed in love directed towards others in kisses from "real lips", "here on earth", and in words which, ultimately, "were the blessing" of real love.

Thus, in the final lines of 'Religion', Ted reveals the active, outwardly focussed, positive aspect of human passion, which is the light which lies hidden in the Qliphothic darkness of the Infernal Palace of Yesod and Malkuth.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Fortune, D., *The Mystical Qabalah*, Society of the Inner Light, London, 1998. p. 285.
2. *The Critical Forum*, Norwich Tapes, London, 1978. A transcript of Ted's introduction can be found at [./Critical Forum.htm](http://Critical Forum.htm).
3. Scholem, G., *On Kabbala and its Symbolism*, Schocken Books, N.Y. 1969. pp. 122 - 124.
4. In conversation with me in 1995, Ted said that *Birthday Letters* dealt with things he "should have resolved thirty years ago. Should have written then, but couldn't".
5. Crowley, A. 'Gematria', 777, Weisser Books, Boston, 1977. p. 28. Theoretically, but never in ritual practice, the digits of the master numbers 11 and 22 may be considered separately or added together in order to understand the full extent of their symbolic meaning and ritual power.
6. Crowley. 777. Ibid. p, xxv.
7. "Samael is considered to be identical with Satan". Crowley, 'Gematria', 777. Ibid. p. 12.
8. The promotional leaflet produced by Gehenna press describes *Howls & Whispers* as "strays" from the *Birthday Letters* "series" and it is tempting to link this with a common description of Qliphoth as left-over fragments, or shells, of a failed creation. The leaflet, however, was not written by Ted, although he saw it and seems to have edited it, deleting the word 'great', for example, from a sentence which describes him as "the great English poet". (Baskin-Hughes archive, British Library).
9. Halevi, S. *Adam and the Kabbalistic Tree*, Rider, London, 1978. p. 235.
10. Ted's first trip to Paris was made with his Uncle Walter in 1954. He had just come down from Cambridge, so he was, indeed, on the brink of a new life. The date in the poem's title, however, was changed from '1957' only at the proof stage of *Howls &*

Whispers, as directed in a letter from Ted to Baskin dated Feb. 1996 (British Library Hughes-Baskin archive). Possibly, Ted wrote the poem at the same time as 'Your Paris' (BL 36 - 38) (THCP 1065), but neither he nor Sylvia was in Paris in 1957, so this date, in any case, was a mistake.

11. For the Cabbalist, as for the Hermeticist, this is the unawakened state of the soul, which choosing "things Mortal", is "seduced by the pleasures of the body", occupies itself in "Pomps and Pageants" and, so, becomes wholly immersed in darkness. (Everard. The Divine Pymander of Hermes, Wizard's Bookshelf, San Diego, 1978. p. 84).

12. The original title of this poem was 'The Scream' (Typescript copy, British Library Baskin- Hughes archive).

13. 'Lineage' (C 14, THCP 218).

14. 'The Scream' (CB 7, THCP 419).

15. In an interview with Blake Morrison in 1993, Ted said he had begun writing The Iron Woman in the mid 1980s "and at one point I was scared by it and had to back off. The image of that scream in particular alarmed me. I wasn't sure what I was pushing myself into. So I left it alone for a bit and turned to Shakespeare instead whilst I got used to it". ('Man of Mettle', The Independent on Sunday, 5 Sept. 1993).

16. 'The Scream' (CB 7, THCP 419).

17. Colin Low, Notes on Kabbalah. Downloadable book at <https://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/nok/index.htm>, 2001. p. 39.

18. SPJ. Especially the entries made on 27 Dec. 1958, and 3 Jan. 1959).

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalHowls & Whispers: The Averse Sephiroth and the Spheres of the Qlippoth (2).

'The Hidden Orestes', 'The Laburnum', 'The Difference'

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Hod

'The Hidden Orestes'
(H&W 3, THCP 1175).
Hod: Sephira 8: Glory. Reverberation.
Element: Air.
Planet: Mercury.
Qlippothic Sphere of Samael.
Virtue: Honesty.
Vice: Dishonesty.
Illusion: Order.
Qlippoth: Rigidity. Rigid Order.

Hod is the place where the first awareness of powers beyond human control come to the one who has become newly self-conscious through Yesod. At Hod, the mind begins to look outwards, to question our place in the world, and to turn to whatever inherited words and wisdom echo our own predicament and will help us to know and understand it. At Hod, because there is no direct contact with the Upper Tree, we turn to the established scholarship of libraries, museums, history, science and mythology – all reverberations of ancient wisdom, and echoes which may be as tricky and deceptive as Mercury, whose energies flow through Hod.

Mercury is the messenger of the gods, and communication is an important part of the energies of Hod. So, we encounter information about the great super-human forces of creation and destruction which, it often seems, govern our lives. We look for ways by which to understand these powers; the patterns in which they function; and the rules by which they seem to operate. And we discover the 'Laws' which have been laid down by our family, our ancestors, and our society in order to help us all survive.

The position of Hod, on the 'passive' Pillar of Form on the Sephirothic Tree, means that our relationship to learning is cerebral and theoretical. And, since Hod is only one part of the mirrored energies of the Supernal Triangle of Kether, Chokmah and Binah (the other two being Netzach and Yesod), its energies alone cannot turn our learning into understanding. The danger is that we mistake learning for understanding, and believe that by strictly complying with the laws passed on to us by the wise, order will be maintained and we, too, will be wise.

The Illusion of Hod is order, and its Qlippoth is Rigidity. If the abstract, cerebral world view we acquire through Hod is false (and we may use our learning, rationality and powers of communication to rigidly justify and defend it), then whatever order we appear to have established is an illusion which must be shattered if we are to progress towards Truth.

In 'The Hidden Orestes', Ted (still, in the poem, at the unenlightened, developmental level of Hod) interprets his world according to the patterns of Ancient Greek mythology. This is entirely consistent with his early acceptance of the views on religion, poetry, and

the poet's role which are expressed by Robert Graves in *The White Goddess*¹. It was no doubt coloured, too, by his studies of early religions and shamanism in the *Anthropology* he read at Cambridge. And, certainly, there are parallels to be found between the pattern of events in *The Oresteia* and the pattern of some parts of Ted's life with Sylvia: enough, perhaps, for him to interpret his own life in terms of the eternal working out of Divinely ordained 'Laws'.

The Oresteian Tragedies were written by the poet Aeschylus some time between 525 - 456 BC. In these plays, the relationships between the gods and man is explored, demonstrated and rationally debated. The poet based his story on the history and legends of his people and on their religious beliefs. And his characters acted out theological and ethical dilemmas which were echoed in the emotional, mental and civic lives of his Athenian audience. In the end, Aeschylus's drama supported the established order of the Athenian State, but the issues he presented are still fundamental to the way we understand our own world and live our own lives. And one of the main issues dealt with in the plays is that of free will.

By interpreting his own and Sylvia's lives in terms of an ancient, continuously repeated pattern, Ted suggested that all the tragic events which befell them were decreed by 'Fate'. If they, like the family of Orestes, were victims of a curse which they had inherited, then nothing could have been done to change anything: Fate decreed the events, and the order of these events was, so to speak, rigidly imposed. Yet the Classical Greek pattern which Ted wanted to impose didn't quite fit: as the last nine lines of Ted's poem admit.

Ted, befogged by love and following the customary patterns and expectations of his tribe, is certainly like the unwary "buffoon" who was, reportedly, married to Electra on her step-father's orders. Sylvia, too, is like Electra in that she wanted to 'kill' her mother, because she believed that her mother was responsible for the death of her beloved father². And Sylvia's mother, like Clytemnestra, fits the role of a "banshee", who heralds the release of deadly maternal Furies on the husband she regards as "the guilty one". But, unlike the pattern of deaths in the Oresteian House of Atreus, it is the daughter, Sylvia, who dies, not her mother; and it is the daughter's husband who becomes the accused.

Acting the "befogged buffoon", Ted, "cannot make out" why Sylvia is so driven and so jealous of other women. And he is "alarmed" by her sudden mood changes – her seemingly "demonic" response to some simple, natural thing. But, as he says (rationally justifying his Hod-like passivity), he is "not to know" what is behind all this or what it portends. This excuse, too, is a defensive response to his feelings of helplessness. He wants to understand all that has happened and, because he seems to have been unable to control events, he tries to interpret everything according to a time-honoured pattern in which the gods are in charge of human affairs. But what he "will never get clear" (or understand) by interpreting things this way, is why the gods appear to have got things wrong: why the old established pattern, which he has learned so well, doesn't fit.

The answer lies with the hidden Orestes at the heart of Ted's poem. And it lies in the even older stories of creation, death and rebirth (stories of Heaven and Earth, gods and man, and shamanic heroes) which exist in every culture and which seem to be a reflection (or reverberation) of some fundamental universal pattern. Beneath the tribal history, story-telling level of Aeschylus's drama, *The Oresteia* is but one more echo of this universal pattern; and Orestes one more shamanic hero who undergoes the necessary trials, and returns to his people with healing energies. Hidden at the heart of *The Oresteia*, as at the heart of Ted's poem, are "the family emeralds", which are the real jewels of wisdom³.

Orestes is the "black panther" who embodies the Goddess's energies. He is the young king, like Dionysus, who kills and replaces the reigning king. But he also kills his mother, Clytemnestra, who, throughout *The Oresteia* represents the Mother Goddess. And for this crime against Nature, the Furies pursue him. Apollo, the Mercurial god of poetry, guides him according to Zeus's instructions. Athena's justice defends him. But the Furies, finally, are placated only by his rescue of the Mother Goddess (the image of Artemis) from the deathly land of the Tauris people; and in this rescue he is aided by his sister Iphegenia.

So, in *The Oresteia*, as in Cabbalistic and Alchemical lore, the loving, creative aspect of the Goddess is seen to be retrieved from the darkness of our world by the harmonious union of male and female human energies. So, she is reunited with the God, wholeness is restored and a new cycle of Nature can begin. This is a description of the true 'Alchemical Marriage', which restores the human soul to union with the Divine: and, in the final lines of Ted's own version of *The Oresteia*,⁴ he carefully and deliberately described it in these terms:

So God and Fate, in a divine marriage, Are made one in the flesh Of all our people –
And the voice of their shout is single and holy. (O 194)

The "Hidden Oresteia" in Ted's poem is the Divine Spirit in us and in our world which, like Dionysus, violently "kills" or destroys the illusion of order. Such disruptive energies can cause madness or possession, as they did in the Maenads. And they do portend death, as a "banshee" "death-shriek" does, although real, physical death, rather than symbolic death, comes only to those who cannot, or do not, learn to find equilibrium in the ensuing turmoil.

At a personal level, in Ted's poem, there is Sylvia's death and the maternal 'Furies' (in various disguises) which pursued Ted and forced him out of his passive state into an active search for answers. And readers who know something of Ted's and Sylvia's lives may well read events from that 'story' into this poem.

However, Ted deliberately couched 'The Hidden Orestes' in impersonal and mythic terms, so that it is relevant to us all. At any time, the hidden Orestes which is the divine, Mercurial spark within us, may, like the panther which kills instinctively and naturally in order that life is sustained and renewed, set in motion a sequence of events which

destroys the illusion of order in our lives. Those whose personal identity is closely bound up with the order they have established for themselves, may panic. Most of us will find a new equilibrium with which we are moderately comfortable until the next disruption. And a few will set out along the long and difficult path towards true understanding of their place in the world, and for wisdom which is based on a harmonious balance of learning and experience, knowledge and intuition, and which requires the active and continuous discrimination of illusion from the Truth.

Netzach
'The Laburnum'.
(H&W 4, THCP 1176).
Netzach: Sephira 7: Victory.
Element: Water.
Planet: Venus.
Qlippothic Sphere of Ghoreb Zereq.
Virtue: Unselfishness.
Vice: Selfishness.
Illusion: Projection.
Qlippoth: Habit. Routine.

Netzach is the place where we are most influenced by our emotions, needs, feelings and moods. Like Hod, Netzach brings us only indirect communication with the Divine energies of the Upper Tree: but, unlike Hod, this communication is non-rational. It comes to us through feelings and intuitions, not through mind-governed learning or through our five bodily senses.

At Netzach, this intuition of something beyond our purely physical and mental understanding makes itself felt as a need beyond the basic needs which are related to our physical survival. We have a feeling that something is missing in our lives – something which is necessary to our security and peace-of-mind but which we can't quite identify. We look for it in many places – in our relationships with others; in our surroundings; in our occupations and pastimes; and, perhaps, in religion. But in our unevolved, spiritually unawakened state at Netzach, we look for it outside ourselves, rather than within us, believing that other people, material things, and even images and icons can provide us with all that is necessary to satisfy this need.

In particular, since Netzach is governed by the Planet Venus and reverberates with the energies of the Goddess of Love, we seek to satisfy this unidentified need through loving relationships with other people. But, since the Vice of Netzach is Selfishness, such a relationship may be governed by our own desires, wants and moods, and may be totally self-centred.

Yet, however self-focussed we may be about satisfying any of our needs, we are not ready to stand alone. Netzach is still part of the Lower Tree – still closely connected to

the vegetative Kingdom of Malkuth – and we are still closely bound to our family, our society, our group. So, we turn to them for support, see ourselves as we imagine they see us or want us to be, and respond to the emotions, needs and desires which they project onto us, or which we imagine will satisfy their requirements of us. Such projection is the Illusion of Netzach, and the danger of it is that our personal identity becomes a mask based wholly on self-deception, illusory feelings and false judgment.

Netzach, which is at the base of the Pillar of Force, belongs to the Element of Water. Water can be liquid or solid. It can change swiftly from a gentle and nurturing fluid to a powerful and destructive force. Netzach's energies are similarly changeable and can be similarly polarised, swinging from glorious, involuntary vitality to Qlippothic life-denying rigidity; from love to hate; from lust to chastity; from 'Victorious Beauty' to the hideous ugliness of the Ghoreb Zereq, the demonic 'Dispersing Ravens' which inhabit Netzach's Qlippothic Sphere. At the base of the Pillar of Mercy, Netzach is the seat of selfless love and compassion, but it can also be a place of merciless and unflinching severity. And, if the Qlippothic Illusion of Netzach prevails in us, it can be a place where we project our own view of the world onto others and interpret mercy as what we believe is best for their welfare: being cruel to be kind, we might say.

The Laburnum tree in Ted's poem, is a symbol of worldly love. It is a tree which, in myth and legend, is associated with Venus Aphrodite: and it was an important symbol of the powerful Love Goddess and of love and security for Sylvia. She associated it with her beloved father, calling it "my father's bean tree" ('Maenad' SPCP 133); and, in 'The Beekeeper's Daughter' (SPCP 118), she captured the sensuous, sensual beauty of this "Golden Rain Tree" which, as a bringer of life and death, exhibits (she wrote admiringly) "a queenship no mother can contest". In June 1962, at a time when her relationship with Ted was seriously troubled, Sylvia still managed to write ecstatically to her mother of having six (she emphasized the number) laburnum trees in her garden in Devon, and they were obviously important to her. But there is only one tree in Ted's poem: just as there is only one Goddess of Love.

Sylvia's need for reassurance that they would "sit together this summer / Under the laburnum", shows how insecure she felt in the midst of the changes and the emotional turmoil as their marriage foundered; how much she wanted Ted to "tell her" their love would survive; and how important and magical a talisman the laburnum was for her.

Ted's "Yes" is repeated four times, to represent stability and to confirm his intent⁵, but this was as self-delusory and non-rational a response as Sylvia's demand that he say it. And the laburnum's deathly, corpse-like aspect in the two lines which follow this reassurance, indicates the deadly untruth of such an exchange and the destructive pattern of such self-delusion and emotional misjudgment.

The following lines, too, indicate the spiritual nature of the change and sacrifice which must take place if Truth is to be found and the true Self awakened. The "clock" of the laburnum is "stuck at noon" – at mid-day, when the sun reaches its zenith before, as in mythology, dying and falling into darkness. The laburnum's "full" sun-yellow flowers

mimic the fullness of the mid-day sun, and they presage the natural Autumn growth of the tree's poisonous seed pods, and (for the tree in Ted's poem) its own un-natural death. So, it is both Midsummer – the traditional time for ritual bonfires and sacrifice – and “noon”. And the fourfold repetition of “noon” in Ted's poem not only carries echoes of ‘bloom’ and ‘doom’ (suggesting the continuous cycles of birth and death in nature), it also encompasses the sound, ‘oo’, which in many spiritual traditions is identified with the Divine Source, and it embeds that spiritual vibration in Earth 6.

But “who dug up the laburnum?”. Who interfered with the natural cycle of death and rebirth? Who usurped the Love Goddess's place in Sylvia's life and ensured that death and darkness would prevail?

Ted suggests that it was “They”, who were “far off” and whose words “sawed” and “chipped” at Sylvia'. “They” who, as if embodying the voracious cravings of the demonic ‘Dispersing Ravens’ of the Qliphothic Sphere of Netzach, carefully sharpened their “little teeth” and destroyed Sylvia's love by telling her “exactly what they thought she should know”. “They” projected their views of the world onto Sylvia, and she responded to their emotional vehemence. Instead of trusting her own instincts, she not only allowed their anger and revenge, and their plans for her future, to cut and shape her but she “probably” encouraged them to do this.

Sylvia correctly identified her need as “the truth”: she wanted, “Only the truth”. And she was willing to endure pain to find it. But the demons which exercised their cravings through the “They” of Ted's poem, and through the “hands and “fingers” of her mother, filled her with “revenge” and a vision of “a future” which she “could not find in” herself. So, she adopted a mask and projected what “they wanted” into her world. “They” (still unidentified in Ted's poem) “tore up the laburnum”. And “They” showed her “the raw hole” and the broken “roots ends” which were the truth of her sacrifice, and which prophetically indicated the truth of her future, premature death.

“They” were merciless, and their concern for Sylvia's welfare was a perverted form of love. But Sylvia's own turbulent emotions, her fragile sense of identity, and her habit of relying on those she loved for support, allowed it to happen. And Ted, in his own immature, unawakened state at Netzach, slept soundly whilst “The laburnum fell”⁷. “They” dug up the tree: but in a sense both Ted and Sylvia were responsible for its death.

As Ted's poem suggests, the rooting out of false values based on emotion and on worldly, material things, is necessary for those who seek the Truth: but it must be done with the utmost care. And there is a broader meaning to the poem, too, which is consistent with Ted's concern for our treatment of the Goddess and our blindness to the damage that we do to nature. We must recognize that our true roots lie in the earth to which we must, ultimately, return. Our earth-bound roots, like those of the laburnum, are a fragile, easily broken, life-supporting network, for which we are all responsible. We should not let others show them to us “broken in air”, for this truly entails our own death. We must not rely on what others tell us about matters which are essential to our own

survival.

In Cabbalistic terms, we must somehow learn to use the energies of both Hod and Netzach without losing touch with our roots in the earthy sphere of Malkuth. The Wodwo's question, "What am I?" reflects our first, primitive need to understand our place in the world. It is this question which first leads us towards the light; and, like Wodwo, we need to understand our connection with "roots/ roots roots roots" 8. Only this way can we become whole, fully evolved human beings and discover our true Self.

Tiphereth
'The Difference'.
(H&W 5, THCP 1177).
Tiphereth: Sephira 6: Beauty.
Element: Fire.
Planet: Shemesh (The Sun).
Qlippothic Sphere of Tagerion.
Virtue: Devotion to the Great Work.
Vice: Pride, Self-importance.
Illusion: Identification.
Qlippoth: Hollowness.

Tiphereth is the most difficult of the Sephiroth to describe. It lies at the heart of the Sephirothic Tree on the central Pillar of Equilibrium, and it is at the heart of a complex of six Sephiroth which represent Adam Kadmon, the archetype of Primordial, Universal Man, in whom all the energies are harmoniously balanced. To cover all the aspects of Tiphereth is, as Colin Low puts it "to cover most of Kabbalah"9. In terms of the human journey up the Path of Wisdom, however, Tiphereth is the Sephira which makes the difference between our remaining on the lower levels of the Tree, at a wholly material level of existence in the World of Assiah, or taking our first step into the upper levels of the Tree and, for the first time, making direct contact with the Divine Spark within us.

Tiphereth is a centre of transition and transmutation. It is the place where inner and outer consciousness touch. And it is the "Place of Incarnation" of the Divine Child in us: the "nucleus of manifestation" of our "higher self"10.

In the overlapping pattern of the Four Cabbalistic Worlds, the Tiphereth (Sephira 6) of the World of Assiah overlaps Malkuth (Sephira 10) in the formative World of Yetzirah: so, we may receive the energies of both these Worlds.

Our first exposure to the higher energies of Yetzirah represents an awakening of consciousness which, in our unevolved, immature state on the lower Tree, may be so sudden and so intense that it is overwhelming. The Sun of Tiphereth may blind and burn us. Yet, its light should bring us new and direct insight into our essential nature: a new, illuminated glimpse of what lies, like a buried seed, beneath the rational, emotional,

sensual persona we have learned to project to the world as our identity.

Dion Fortune writes that “there is a certain emotional concentration and exaltation which makes the higher phases of consciousness available, without which it is impossible to attain them”; and she likens this to a “burning fire” in which “all the dross of the nature” is consumed¹¹. She writes, too, that “by the very nature of the human mind, with the brain as its instrument, this white heat cannot endure for long”, and, whether it brings pain or ecstasy, it dies away and exhaustion and, perhaps, emptiness ensue, Nevertheless, the mind has undergone “an expansion that never wholly retracts”¹².

In the first twelve lines of ‘The Difference’, Ted describe this process exactly. The emotional and physical collapse as this uncontrolled and uncontrollable “epileptic” ‘seizure’ takes place, are typical of the sudden stripping away of the persona which the energies of Tiphereth can effect. The masks are suddenly gone, like “a dress ripped off”; the past is “wrenched open”; and what is revealed is the core of the inner being. It is what we are born with; the result of what has been; and what, ultimately, is the source of our deepest needs and strongest drives.

To experience such a moment of Truth is intensely personal. But Truth is absolute and universal. So, ‘she’ and ‘he’, in Ted’s poem, might be any couple, although the revelation each experiences is interpreted in worldly terms according to their own lives.

We may conjecture that ‘she’, in Ted’s poem, is Sylvia. And, in the light of Sylvia’s letters and journals, and other scraps of information we may have about her life, we may further conjecture that the things which Ted describes in the first part of the poem took place early in their marriage. Ted and Sylvia were married on June 16th, 1956. Some time in June Sylvia received an unexpected letter from Richard Sassoon, in which he explained his apparent abandonment of her after a love affair which had lasted from 1954 until March 1956, when she had expected to meet him in Paris¹³. But “Dickie”, in Ted’s poem, may or may not refer to Richard Sassoon. And the subject of the parenthetical phrase “not his name” may, ambiguously, be either “Dickie”, or the “he” of the poem who is suddenly “out of his depth” in at least one of the roles he has chosen to play in this relationship.

Sylvia wrote poetically and ecstatically in her journals about her love affair with Sassoon. Her “mystic vision with Sassoon” became part of one of her stories, and part of a diary entry on 9 March, 1956. And in January 1956 she wrote, “We together make the world love itself and incandesce”(SPJ 15 Jan. 1956). Yet, even as she expressed her passion for him, she criticized his lack of “healthy physical bigness”, and longed “for someone to blast over him”(SPJ 25 Feb. 1956) and replace him as her idol. On April 18th 1956, even as she longed for Ted, she wrote to Sassoon accusing him of “brutally” deserting her just as her father did when he died, and she blamed him for the “superfluous unnecessary and howling void” his long absence had caused her.

The “choking / Revelation as of knotted lovers / Lifted from Pompeii’s ashes”, which, in the ambiguity of Ted’s poem both “she” and “he” see, and which leaves them both

“shaken”, is described in realistic terms and can, if we wish, be linked with the “knotted” lives of particular individuals. But the revealed truth of Tiphereth is that even the closest union of male and female cannot survive if it is based on masks and self-deception. Nor can any human relationship, however loving and close, wholly satisfy the needs of the Divine spark within us.

“He” and “she” in Ted’s poem are both, momentarily stripped of their masks and illusions, and both are changed by it. She has “The blame stunned out of her”; he sees an aspect of her that he has never seen before, and sees his perceived role in their relationship, “not only as a doctor”, undermined. And, because of the careful imprecision of grammatical structure in the sentence which begins with “shaken” and ends with “survival”, both he and she survive by the “skin-of-the-teeth”.

This was the first difference that the energies of Tiphereth made to these lovers’ lives. But it “was nothing” to the difference which occurs in the final six lines of the poem and which, although seemingly rooted in historical events, is expressed in metaphorical and visionary terms.

Sylvia’s awareness of her need for union with a strong male who would replace her father is frequently expressed in her journals, as was her need to write. And eventually she brought these two needs together in her marriage and in her poetry. So, she combined the worldly, loving, heart-felt Tipherethic energies of the World of Assiah with the artistic and formative energies of the World of Yetzirah. The Sephira at which these two energies overlap on the Sephirothic Tree, however, is Malkuth in the World of Yetzirah, which is still governed by Saturn, the Father, and is still the Qlippothic realm of Lilith and her demons.

Sylvia’s poetic purpose was to get “back, back, back” to her Daddy; to poetically banish her personal demons and, thus, to forge a new, whole, identity for herself. But she allowed the Vice of Tiphereth, which is Pride and Self-importance, and the worldly energies of Assiah to direct her Great Work towards material goals. And she succumbed to the temptations of the demons of Malkuth when she imagined that she was strong enough to fly (metaphorically) to the sun on Ariel. Also, believing herself to be stronger than she was, she poetically recreated herself as the Bee Queen and declared her independence¹⁴. By doing so, she challenged the jealous Goddess and, also, cut herself off from the protective energies of Abba, the All-Father of the Upper Tree. This was an act of hubris for which she paid dearly. Her poetic flight brought a glimpse of Truth, and it was a creative victory, but she was burned up, exhausted and alone. So, in Ted’s vision in the final part of his poem, she is carried off, like Persephone, by the Father God of Earth.

The difference between “her” first exposure to the transformative energies of Tiphereth and this last one, was the difference between skin-of-the-teeth survival and death.

The difference between the changes “he” physically “watched” and experienced on that first occasion, and the “seeing” which Ted (the mature ‘Watcher’, fully conscious at

Tiphereth) described in the last part of his poem, was a difference between “nothing” and everything. In a Tipherethic vision born from his innermost nature and shaped by all his experiences, Ted glimpsed the Truth and gained a new understanding of all that had happened.

Given the Cabbalistic framework of *Howls & Whispers*, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Ted’s vision of Sylvia “forever” grasped in the arms of the “huge-eyed” stranger and trapped in the darkness under “the floor” of his world was what drove him to attempt the difficult, healing journey which he undertook for both of them in *Birthday Letters*. But it was also his understanding of the crucial difference between these two Tipherethic experiences which made him aware of the dangers of letting his own personal and worldly needs outweigh the spiritual and universal aspects of The Great Work.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Ted was given a copy of *The White Goddess* by a master at Mexborough Grammar School; and, as Faas comments (UU 71), it “had already turned into a kind of Bible” for Ted when he was writing his earliest poems.

2. All this is consistent with Sylvia’s own words in her journals and in her poems.

3. ‘Emeralds’, perhaps, because the wisdom of Hermes / Mercury (whose energies rule Hod) was found, long ago, inscribed on an emerald tablet (the Smaragdine Tablet), which begins: “In truth certainly and without doubt, what is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of one thing”. This belief in the unity of all, is the hidden light which underpins the traditional arts of Alchemy and Cabbala.

4. Ted Hughes, *Aeschylus: The Oresteia*, Faber, London, 1999.

5. Four is the number of Earth and of the four Elements of which all things are created. We speak of the four corners of the Earth; of the four seasons; and four brings everything together in ‘four-square’, material stability.

6. Cabbalists not only believe in the spiritual power of particular words (especially those which represent the Divine Source), they also believe that the sound vibrations of each letter have specific spiritual energy. It is quite likely that Ted intended the letter ‘n’, which brackets the vibrations of ‘oo’, to give each repetition a particular magical power and, depending on the tone in which the word ‘noon’ is pronounced, that the four-fold repetition may link Divine and human energies in each of the four Worlds of the Cabbalistic Tree.

7. In terms of Ted’s own quest for understanding and truth, the Goddess’s tree was still “strengthening” at this time of his life. In his own dream world of illusion and folly, it was “barely” halfway through winter, and the midsummer noon of burning and sacrifice was yet to come.

8. Here is another fourfold, earth-associated repetition, this time from quite early in Ted's work. It suggests that he was already aware of the magical power attributed to numbers before 1961, when 'Wodwo' was first published (New Statesman, 62: 347,15 Sept). Ted would have appreciated the coincidence that 'Wodwo' appears on page 183 in both Wodwo (the Faber, paperback edition) and Ted Hughes Collected Poems. Curiously, too, $183 + 183 = 366$, and this reduces to 6 – the number of Venus, the Goddess who rules Netzach: alternatively, 183 on its own reduces to 3, the number of the Triple Goddess. Coincidence? Or another reverberation of the Platonic harmonies?

9. Low, Notes on Kabbalah, p. 52.

10. Fortune, The Mystical Qabalah, p. 182 - 3.

11. In Alchemy, too, the impure elements of the prima materia must be burned away in order to reveal the seed of pure Gold which belongs to the Sephira of Tiphereth.

12. Fortune, op. cit. p. 190.

13. Middlebrook, D. Her Husband, Viking, USA, pp. 45 -6.

14. She does this in her 'Bee poems', SPCP 211 - 219.

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Valid XHTML 1.0 TransitionalHowls & Whispers: The Averse Sephiroth and the Spheres of the Qliploth (3).

'The Minotaur 2', 'Howls and Whispers'

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Gevurah

'The Minotaur 2'

(H&W 3, THCP 1175).

Gevurah: Sephira 5: Strength. Severity.

Element: -

Planet: Mars.

Qlippothic Sphere of Golahab.

Virtue: Energy. Courage.

Vice: Cruelty. Destruction.

Illusion: Invincibility.
Qlippoth: Bureaucracy.

Now, on the Path of Wisdom, Tiphereth is linked to Gevurah and Chesed, making a triangle of energies which mirrors that of Tiphereth, Hod and Netzach on the Lower Tree. If the energies of the Lower Tree have been combined to form the Animal Soul of Nefesh (AKT 137), a new, higher awareness begins to shape our perception and understanding of our world.

This change is clear in 'The Minotaur 2', which occupies Gevurah (Sephira 5) on the Sephirothic Tree. Gevurah lies directly above Hod on the Pillar of Judgment and Form and, so, reflects (or mirrors) the Hod-shaped view of the world which Ted expressed in 'The Hidden Orestes' (H & W 3). Once again, in 'The Minotaur 2', Ted turned to the ancient, inherited wisdom embedded in Classical Greek mythology for support, but he had learned at Tiphereth the difference between knowledge based solely on sense and reason, and the understanding which is possible when that knowledge is combined with intuitive, subconscious and psychic energies.

In 'The Minotaur 2', Ted is no longer the "befogged buffoon", helplessly immersed in a myth, as he was in 'The Hidden Orestes'. Now, he is detached: he is the Watcher, describing how he 'saw' Sylvia and himself as actors in a drama which reflected the pattern of the old myth. He describes how he "saw the plot"; saw the role he played in it and his participation in Sylvia's "first scene"; and watched her "performance" as the drama unfolded. But he is no longer puzzled by the discrepancies between the Greek story, in which Theseus slew the Minotaur and returned, alive, from the Labyrinth, and the pattern which he saw, in which Sylvia played the heroic role but the Minotaur killed her. Instead, Ted saw the "surreal mystery" which began this drama; and, embedded in the illusory surface pattern of events (just as it is embedded in events in this poem), he saw the gleam of true "gold".

To understand this, it is necessary to see the Cabbalistic patterns which underlie this poem, and to know the nature of the Averse energies of Gevurah, which is a place of discrimination and judgment governed by the warlike energies of Mars.

The Averse energies of Gevurah are those born of an excess of Gevurah's Strength and Courage combined with a false interpretation of its Spiritual Vision, which is The Vision of Power. Without the balancing energies of Chesed and Tiphereth, strength and power are expressed in the unbending enforcement of judgment based on 'Laws' and rules of behaviour. Strength turns to violence, power become tyrannical, courage is misdirected, and the Illusion of Invincibility prevails.

In 'The Minotaur 2', Ted saw how the picnic quarrel (just like the earlier quarrel he described in 'The Minotaur' in Birthday Letters (BL 120, THCP 1120) somehow connected Sylvia to an instinctive inner strength which was essential to her poetry and her quest for wholeness. In both poems, that strength is expressed as anger, but only in

'The Minotaur 2' did Ted see the true source of that anger and see that although Sylvia also "recognized gold", she misjudged its origin and meaning.

What that "recognized gold" was, Ted states quite plainly in the sixth line of the 'The Minotaur 2'. It was "A cry of bereavement": a cry which, in Cabbala, is the cause of whole Cabbalistic quest. In Cabbala, this is the cry of the Soul separated from the Divine Source; the cry of a Soul bereft and left desolate by this loss. In Hebrew Cabbala, it is the cry of the exiled Shekina. And in Christian and NeoPlatonic Cabbala, is the cry of Fallen Soul, banished from the Paradisal garden and longing to return.

This cry is the gold at the heart of Ted's poem, but linked with it there (in line 7) is the misjudgment which Sylvia made about it. Sylvia recognized that cry of bereavement from her own experience and her own feelings at the loss of her father. And, as her journals show, she came to see that loss as the cause of all her feelings of emptiness and panic, all her nightmares, all her self-doubt and distress. Her response to this, as her poems and journals also show, was to express her anguish as anger: to try, so-to-speak to kill 'The Beast'. So, the once beloved human father, who was "the bullman earlier", became 'Daddy' and she killed him with "a stake" in his "fat black heart" (SPCP 222 - 4). Sylvia's mistake was to look no further than her worldly situation for her sense of loss and, so, she did not discern the spiritual need which was also part of her anguish.

Sylvia recognized that cry of bereavement, recognized that this was what drove her to try and regain wholeness, but she picked up the "skein of blood", the blood-line which linked her to her earthly father, and with unwavering courage, under the illusion that she was strong enough to be invincible, she followed it, alone, into the darkness and to her death.

Had she been less single-minded and less blinded by anger - had she shown more calm, considered judgment, more love, more patience, more mercy – Sylvia might have accepted help from Ted instead of "ignoring" him. In the Greek Minotaur myth, Theseus, too, had been angry, but he took guidance from the gods and he accepted Ariadne's loving help and her gift of the magical thread which led him back to the light. Sylvia, too, might have chosen a different thread: not a blood-soaked one which "twitched" like an animal and drew her down into the earth, but a spiritual one which led her up towards the apex of the Tree and to reunion with the Divine Source.

'The Minotaur 2' is a poem of judgment, about misjudgment. It is a strong poem, but there is no anger in it. Ted used four-line stanzas for earth-bound stability, and he indicated the earth-bound roots of his own understanding in Classical Greek mythology. But the spiritual energies of Goddess govern the poem with the vibrations of her number, 3: there are three stanzas and twelve lines to the poem; and 12, the governing number of the poem, reduces in Numerology to three.

Chesed
'Howls and Whispers'

(H&W 4, THCP 1178).

Chesed: Sephira 4: Love. Majesty. Sorrow.

Element: -

Planet: Jupiter.

Qlippothic Sphere of Gasheklah.

Virtue: Humility. Obedience.

Vice: Tyranny. Hypocrisy. Bigotry. Gluttony.

Illusion: Being Right. Self-righteousness.

Qlippoth: Ideology.

'Howls and Whispers' occupies the Sephira of Chesed (4: Love, Majesty, Sorrow) which is linked to Gevurah (5) at the mid-level of the Cabbalistic Tree. Both are linked to Tiphereth (6) and both are Sephira at which we form archetypal visions in our imagination and begin to allow these to direct our goals and actions. At Gevurah our vision of the archetype hero (male or female) inspires and spurs us on, and at Chesed the vision of enthroned Majesty, which embodies perfect love and stability, fills our imagination and becomes our Yetziritic image of ourselves, guides our goals, and is the model of behaviour that we seek to emulate.

At this level of the Tree, the individual spirit (known in Hebrew Cabbala as the Neshamah or Yetziritic Intellectual Soul) links each human being with the Divine Source and is part of the human consciousness, as it was not at the lower levels of the Tree. Now, if the Soul is to grow pure and strong, the individual must learn self-governance; must break down the old patterns of reliance on others; and must accept full responsibility for their own judgments, actions and attitudes. Such a naked, unprotected, unmasked state is not easy to achieve. It requires the strength, courage and determination of the archetype hero of Gevurah, without reliance on rigid, socially established rules. And it requires the powerful love and mercy of the throned Majesty of Chesed, which allows for our own failure and fosters the ability to learn from each failure, but which must remain clear-sighted, unswayed by emotion and unbiased in judgement.

It also requires trust in the innate guiding spirit of the heart – the Tipherethic energies, inner and outer, rational and non-rational, which fill our individual worlds.

Often, as in Alchemy (and especially if the ego-masks which are part of our identity have been long-established and much relied upon) this process of unmasking and honest self-reliance requires a baptism of fire in which the ego must die for the naked spirit to be set free. Those who cannot relinquish their masks, or whose self-governance is not yet sufficiently strong, will remain (perhaps for the rest of their lives) on the Assiahic plane of Natural Man, in what Blake called "the abyss of the five senses" (MHH 'A Memorable Fancy'). Metaphorically, this is a kind of death.

In Ted's poem, 'Howls and Whispers', Sylvia undergoes just such a baptism of fire, but for her this so-called 'initiation of Chesed' became, quite literally, a life or death

situation.

'Howls and Whispers', at Chesed, lies immediately above Netzach on the Pillar of Mercy and Force, and it reflects the Netzach poem, 'The Laburnum', just as 'The Minotaur 2' reflected 'The Hidden Orestes' which lay below it on the Pillar of Form. Again, as in 'The Laburnum', Sylvia is exposed to the powerful emotional energies of loved ones, mentors, guides and friends. And again, her ability to stand alone and to distinguish truth from illusion is challenged by this exposure. But now, too, her archetypal vision of wholeness – the vision which included perfect mastery of herself and of her writing, and a perfect marriage of equals¹ – all this is threatened.

Disastrously, too, the Illusion of Chesed is 'Being Right', and this is the illusion which the Demons of Chesed (the Gasheklah: the Smiters and Disturbers of Souls), who are embodied in this poem in Sylvia's advisors, foster in Sylvia. This same illusion is clearly demonstrated in her advisors' own words and actions, as is the Qlippoth of Chesed (Ideology), for they base their views on moral codes and "facts".

Self-righteousness fuelled the joyous "gratification" of Sylvia's mother, and her advice to "be strong" was the result of her view that Sylvia's marriage to Ted had always been wrong and that Ted was the guilty party, therefore Sylvia was right to get rid of him.

Sylvia's analyst offered the 'right' advice, based (presumably) on her professional knowledge of marriage breakdown and divorce proceedings: it, too, reflected the assumption that Sylvia was in the right.

And the "professional dopest" who "squatted at" Sylvia's ear and was the "bug" in Ted's bed was driven by the need "to prove that only she/ Knew the facts".

Ted's description of these people, their interference and the results of that interference is detailed and clear. And it is factual, in so far as he quoted directly from letters which Sylvia left for him to find. Unlike 'The Laburnum', however, in which emotion held sway, the disturbers in 'Howls and Whispers' use "facts" and rational argument to increase Sylvia's anger and mental confusion. Ted's anger and distress in both poems is clear. What is less clear is how, in 'Howls and Whispers', as the mature poet and The Watcher at Tiphereth, he used his own Yetziritic archetype visions to place all these events within a Cabbalistic framework in order to obtain a more objective view of them. Such distancing is standard Cabbalistic practice. It provides the Cabbalist with a means of discerning error; of better controlling his or her emotions; and of reframing the past so as to establish a firm base from which to approach the future².

The clues to Ted's archetype, mythic vision in 'Howls and Whispers' lie not only in the numerology of the poem, where the Mercurial number 8 is strongly present, but also in the Mercurial imagery Ted used. Mercury's trickster nature is evident in the "bug", "goblin", "go-between"; and, since Mercury is the quick-spirited, ethereal messenger, his energies can be seen in all the mechanics of electrical communication and electrical interference ("static", "bug", "voltage", "wired", "tape-recorder", "step-up transformer")

which are associated with communication in this poem. Most telling of all in revealing the archetype vision Ted held in his imagination as he shaped this poem is his double reference to Iago³, Shakespeare's superbly believable, human embodiment of all the charming, duplicitous, tricky energies which belong to the mythical message-carrier.

Mercury, the Trickster, dominates Ted's poem; but to understand why, it is necessary to look at Ted's discussion of Othello in Shakespeare and The Goddess of Complete Being. "Iago", Ted writes there, "seems to be the evil one, the emissary of Hell...". Yet his cool, cynical, calculated actions are not direct emanations of some infernal god's passion, but "cold" "intellectual reflections" of it (SGCB 228). Iago's distortions of fact are, like the "garblings" of Sylvia's advisors in 'Howls and Whispers', poured into his victim's unwary "as-if-sleeping ear". He, too, preys on his victim's sexual jealousy, and is an "innocent-eyed" "double spy" who provides "facts" and supports them with dubious proof. His suggestions and proof seem to lead to only one logical, 'right' conclusion and yet he works on Othello's wholly irrational emotions.

Within the overall framework of the "Tragic Equation" which Ted deals with at length in Shakespeare and The Goddess of Complete Being, Desdemona and Othello are seen as personifications of the Great Goddess (as Love Goddess) and her consort. They are equal partners in an Alchemical Marriage based on pure love. Iago, as the personification of the "fanatic but irresponsibly abstract and inhuman intelligence" of the "Puritan Manichean" outlook which governed conventional moral codes in Shakespeare's time, tests the purity of that love to the limit in a way which was wholly understandable to Shakespeare's audience.

Sylvia, too, throughout Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers has been seen as the personification of the Great Goddess, and Ted as her consort – her god /hero/King. Now, in 'Howls and Whispers', at this critical point in Sylvia's growth towards spiritual wholeness, the purity and strength of their love was tested by a whole host of Iagos whose arguments reflected the socially accepted 'rules' of morality of their time. So, the dark aspect of the Goddess was released in Sylvia and she experienced the same sort of double vision as that which caused the downfall of Othello and the death of Desdemona. Love and lust became confused: and jealousy, anger and revenge over-rode judgment and mercy.

In Ted's poem, the furious, destructive, jealous energies which were released in Sylvia were reflected and reinforced (as if by "step-up transformers") by her Iago-like advisors. She "screamed" all that accumulated "voltage" of jealous, possessive rage at him, but the demons of Chesed, the Disturbers of Souls, had done their work well and her anger did not relieve the torment she was in. So, in the end, those uncontrolled energies killed her.

Beyond the personal story which Ted tells in this poem, and framed within the Tragic Equation archetype by which he shaped that story, is the role which Mercury plays in testing the purity of the Soul. For he is not only the messenger of the underworld gods (including the Hag aspect of the Goddess) he is also messenger of the gods of the

highest level of the Cabbalistic tree. He, as psychopomp, can lead the Soul out of the Underworld and towards the Divine Source, and his essential and valuable testing presence is both destructive and generative. He is the Alchemical quintessence which breaks down and dissolves the gross, material aspects of our nature in order to release the pure spiritual gold.

This, then, is the gleam of light which lies buried in the Averse energies of Chesed on the Cabbalistic Tree.

In order to survive the baptism of fire which Mercury administers, however, love must be pure, and the individual strong, vigilant, mature and wise. Sylvia, in many ways was not yet ready for this corrosive test, and death ended any chance that she might learn from this experience and so find other ways continue her quest for wholeness.

Here, at Chesed, Sylvia's journey ended. But Ted's did not.

Sylvia's death, in Ted's Cabbalistic interpretation of their lives, cast her into the Abyss - the place of unbeing. His lifelong preoccupation with themes of Bardo states, Orphic rescue and other sorts of rebirth from the dead, however, attested to his belief in the possibility of rebirth, and the whole sequence of *Howls & Whispers* was predicated on that belief. So, Ted's Cabbalistic purpose in the last four poems remained unchanged as he continued his journey to the apex of the Averse Tree, finding whatever light he could in the qliphothic darkness and gathering it all together so that a new beginning might be possible.

The surface 'story' of these final poems, however, differs from that of the earlier poems in that it is no longer the story of their shared lives, but of Ted's life after Sylvia's death and of the ways in which he was haunted by her spirit.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Spiritual Vision of Chesed is the 'Vision of Love'.

2. "Cabala always connotes motion, both in the way the past is conceived and the way the future is anticipated&hellip... Cabala incarnates this principle of reinventing the past as a structural basis of the future". Beitchman, P. *Alchemy of the Word*, State University of New York, Albany, 1998. p.99. This describes very well the underlying re-forming process which Ted undertook in his dealings with the Averse energies in the poems of *Howls & Whispers*.

3. Sylvia's mother reiterates advice "like Iago"; and the go-between is an "innocent-eyed, gleeful Iago".

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'The City'

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'The City'

(H&W 8, THCP 1179).

Daath

Above Chesed and Gevurah, separating the Supernal Triangle of Kether, Chokmah and Binah from the rest of the Tree, lies the Abyss and the so-called 'Invisible Sephiroth' of Daath (Knowledge). Daath is the most occult of places. Dion Fortune describes it as "the point of unity in which all knowledge is contained...the unification of all on the Tree of Life." (MQ 334). It is never shown on the graphic representation of the Sephirothic Tree. It has no deity name, no angelic host, no planet or element assigned to it. It is the least known and yet the most important Sephira, and all descriptions of it are metaphorical and incomplete.

Daath is situated at the point where the Abyss bisects the Middle Pillar of the Tree but it is not on the same plane as the other Sephiroth. Sometimes it is imagined as projecting from the Supernal Triangle of Kether, Chokmah and Binah as if it were the apex of a pyramid of which they form the base.

Crowley depicted it as the place where, from the chaos of the Abyss of un-being in which swirl all possible forms, elements which are struggling to 'become' find a point of unity and coalescence¹. He described it as "this desert...wherein the Universe", and he wrote of it as the place where "I", the ego, "breaks" and "All life is choked", but from it new life must come (BOT 73). And Fortune calls it the "Sphere of Becoming" where lies "the secret of generation and regeneration, the key to the manifestation of all things" (MQ 51) where "past and present are synthesised in the future" (MQ 338).

Daath also bridges the Abyss so that the essence of Kether can be carried to the created world. Like Yesod, it touches the Yetziritic World and is a tunnel or doorway through which we may glimpse our own innermost nature (our shadow), and through which the Divine creative energies may reach us in flashes of intuition and imagination and, so, make the unmanifest manifest in our own creative endeavours. Most importantly, by means of Daath, the knowledge of Truth, which is born from the union of Understanding (Binah) and Wisdom (Chokmah), reaches the fully evolved Soul and brings it into a state of cosmic awareness.

'The City', which is the eighth poem of *Howls & Whispers*, occupies Daath.

Ted, as a mature and experienced Cabbalist could, whilst seated at Tiphereth, meditate on Daath with reasonable safety². In this way, he would have been best able to balance Justice and Mercy, unite Wisdom and Understanding, and perhaps find Truth. So, he became a shadow in his "own darkness" and, as if driving through a dark city, he used Sylvia's worldly creations as an aid to his meditation, "pondering" what she did as she strove to reach and express her true Self. By this means he caught glimpses of Sylvia's spirit. And, from amongst the shells of the Averse Tree, these are the glimpses of light that he gathered. These, too, are the "blocks of light" to which "scholars, priests" and "pilgrims" come, to lodge there briefly and increase the light by their own creative efforts.

Suitably, since Daath is the threshold between the uncreated and the created, between death and life, and life and death, Ted "nearly always" glimpses Sylvia "at some crossing" where crowds of strangers "surge past" her like Souls passing to and from the desert of the Abyss. And since she is "Staring upward, lost" in that desert, her face seems to him like "a desert Indian's, wild, bewildered".

'Bewildered', here, is exactly the right word, and this was not the first time Ted had used desert imagery to convey something of the anguish of Sylvia's spirit or had linked it with formlessness and becoming. In 'The God' in *Birthday Letters* (BL 188-191), for example, Sylvia's heart "mid-Sahara, raged / In its emptiness"; in '18 Rugby Street' (BL 20 -24) he saw her face as a "spirit mask", a "prototype face" like one seen through "the smoke of a Navajo campfire"; and he used desert imagery in 'The Badlands' (BL 82-86) to describe the "Hellish" "afterlife" atmosphere which had so disturbed Sylvia's spirit when she was alive.

In 'The City', Ted looks into the teeming darkness from the protective safety of his car and sees Sylvia "stock still", as if on a threshold, wanting "to ask something" but not able to; wanting to recognize and communicate with someone, but not able to; and, finally, "trying to remember" or (and in Ted's imagined vision he sees uncertainty) "suddenly not to remember"³. 'Remember', is the final, most important word of this poem, but its full meaning does not become apparent until the last lines of 'Superstitions' – which is the final poem of the sequence.

So, the poem ends in uncertainty. And this uncertainty about whether or not Sylvia's spirit will eventually cross that threshold between unbeing and being remains with Ted for the rest of *Howls & Whispers*.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. See Colin Low's discussion of Daath in his *Notes on Kabbala*, p.59.
2. "... it must be emphasized that meditations on Daath, unless very carefully decided on beforehand and directed, are not very safe, except when they are just approached

with a view to helping the human idea of Justice when such a thing is necessary for balancing up the development of the Soul". Fortune, The Mystical Qabala, p.336.

3. In the version of 'The City' published in The Sunday Times, 26 October 1997, "suddenly" is omitted.

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Howls & Whispers: The Averse Sephiroth and the Spheres of the Qlippoth (5).

'Moon-Dust', 'The Offers'. 'Superstitions'

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Binah

'Moon-Dust'

(H & W 9, THCP 1180).

Binah: Sephira 3: Understanding. Truth. Intuition.

Element: -

Planet: Saturn.

Qlippothic Sphere of The Triple Hell.

Virtue: Silence.

Vice: Inertia. Avarice.

Illusion: Death.

Qlippoth: Fatalism.

Above Daath on the Averse Tree lies Shahul, which is known as 'The Triple Hell' or 'The Grave Hell of The Supernals'. This First Palace of the Averse Tree contains the combined Qlippothic energies of Kether (1), Chokmah (2) and Binah (3), the demons of which are, respectively, Thamiel (The Dual Contending Forces); Chaigidel (The Hinderers); and Satariel (The Concealers).

Always Binah and Chokmah work together to channel the energies of Kether to the lower part of the Tree. Binah, the All Mother and Chokmah, the All Father, must be united before new life can be created in the world of Nature. She is the egg and the womb: he the fertilising sperm. She gives Form and shape to his undirected Force. But in the Qlippothic Sphere of the Triple Hell, her Judgment may be especially merciless and completely stultify or imprison his energies: and his Mercy may be actively misdirected and unjust and, so, cause chaos and destruction. All three of the Supernal

Sephira are connected by Daath to the Abyss, and, whether their energies are Qlippothic or not, they have particular creative and destructive power.

In the proof copies and in the published editions of *Howls & Whispers*, 'Moon-Dust' is poem 9 and 'The Offers' is poem 10. Together they occupy the Sephiroth of Binah and Chokmah. In the early draft list of poems which is amongst the Baskin – Hughes papers at the British Library, the order of these two poems is reversed. However, both poems have male and female aspects, and in both poems the energies are clearly out of balance due to Sylvia's death. And, since the energies of Binah and Chokmah work together at this level of the Tree, either of these poems could sit at either Sephira without upsetting the overall balance of their conjunction.

Curiously, on one of the sketches which Baskin made for the etching which would accompany 'Moon-Dust', he has written the title as "Moon lust" ¹. It is impossible to tell whether this is deliberate or a mistake², but 'Moon lust' nicely glosses the first stanza of Ted's poem, in which Sylvia's "passions" are his subject. Passion, however, is not always synonymous with lust. Not does it necessarily entail sexual desire, although this would appropriately reflect the sexual fertilising nature of the union of Binah and Chokmah.

Sylvia did, indeed, have many passions. In fact, almost everything she did was done with passion. She was vehement in her pursuit of the aims and objects on which she focussed, driven by overpowering, often irrational zeal, and subject to outbursts of feeling and emotion. There was passion, too, in the pain and suffering she willingly endured in order to achieve her goals.

Sylvia's passion launched her quest for wholeness. And in 'Moon-Dust', Ted's image of Sylvia's face left "like the dandelion" (which is a symbol of passion in religious art and also a golden, sun-reflecting flower of the Goddess) "at the edge of the launching pad", suggests how small and vulnerable, yet persistent and tough, she was in the face of such a huge endeavour.

Sylvia's "story", too, (not her life but the imaginative story she made of it in all her writing and her art) was fuelled by her passion. But that passion had "been and gone" by the time Ted wrote this poem, and what he saw when he looked back was only a rocky fragment, a "cratered moon": a real but mysterious place of myth and imagination and great ventures, in which his own story seemed to exist like that of a visiting astronaut.

Ted chose his imagery carefully, here, for the "capsule on its tripod" and the "few rocks" which he collected on this moon-visit both suggest the concealed potential which is part of Binah's power. In her womb, as in the cauldron of many a Moon Goddess or Mother Goddess³, new life gestates: and her "peculiar rocks" (like those brought back to Earth from the Moon) are pregnant with hidden potential. Literally and poetically, just a single flower, like the harebell in Ted's early poem 'Still Life' (W 18, THCP 147 – 8) or the even earlier "Snowdrop" (L 58, THCP 86), has the power to break open these rocks and release that potential.

In the first twelve lines of 'Moon-Dust', Teed recalled the rocky, uncertain landscape of the past. "Now", in the final stanza, he borrows the powers of that flower to reveal its hidden life. "Now", standing firmly in the present, in a single line which has the force of a command, Ted poetically and magically directs Sylvia (with "only her cheek lit", like a setting moon) to "Sink in the West". So, Sylvia enters the realm of Binah as Ama, the Dark Sterile Mother. But the Illusion of Binah is Death, and in the West lies, also, the mythical Land of Promise, the realm of Binah, Mother of All Things, the place of new beginnings.

Given Binah's double aspected nature, it is appropriate that Sylvia enters the darkness with the last of the sun reflected from just one moony cheek⁴. But since passion was the launching pad of Sylvia's creative "story", and passion also fuelled "giant, weightless leaps" in Ted's imagination, it is certain that Ted's reference to Sylvia's "cheek" was an intentional pun. 'Cheek' may refer to a part of the face but it also means 'effrontery', 'cool confidence' and the sort of courage and impudence which are the valuable components of passion and are powerful motivating forces in any difficult venture.

That same 'cheek', is also linked to Ted's own difficult poetic venture by his final image of himself studying "these peculiar rocks" which are literally and metaphorically the words of his poem. He imagines himself "touching at them", "like a flower" nodding in a breath of animating wind, in his own attempt to reveal whatever life lies concealed within them.

This is the potential which even the most fragile of the Goddess's flowers has the power to reveal. And this is the light which lies concealed by the demons of Binah in the Qlippothic darkness of the Averse Tree.

Moon-dust, for poets, is a magical substance, the source of mystery, inspiration and madness. If we borrow Baskin's apparent title for this poem, we might say that passion, if it is uncontrolled and has the naked Force of Chokmah, can easily result in the madness of Moon lust. Binah, with her great powers, can fix and contain that Force. Or, by combining her Understanding with Chokmah's Wisdom and using more balanced control, she can transform it into the imaginative stimulus of Moon-Dust.

Chokmah

'The Offers'

(H & W 10, THCP 1180).

Chokmah: Sephira 2: Wisdom. Creativity.

Element: -

Planet: The Zodiac or fixed stars.

Qlippothic Sphere of The Triple Hell.

Virtue: Devotion. Good.

Vice: Evil.

Illusion: Independence.

Qlippoth: Arbitrariness.

Perhaps because Chokmah is the source of the male creative energies, and the place of the Magus, Magician and poet who each seek the help of the Goddess to channel those energies into our world, the story told in 'The Offers' (H & W 10) is, more than in any other poem in *Howls & Whispers*, not what it seems. Like 'Moon-Dust', it shares the energies of Chokmah and Binah. It deals with the effects of female on male. And it describes the way in which a powerful, concealed, female spirit intermittently surfaces to arrest, disturb, and seek to control and direct the male energies. As always in *Howls & Whispers* and *Birthday Letters*, it presents a realistic, seemingly factual story, which many will accept as a true, if puzzling, account of events. But below that surface story lies a mythic, Cabbalistic level which is wholly involved with Ted's own creativity and his fundamental belief in the purpose and the power of poetry.

Based on his own experience, Ted presumed that all poets "draw on a mythic substructure of some kind" (SGCB 39). And, as he noted in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, "wherever [Shakespeare's] dramatic characters have a mythic personality they tend to have other busy lives in other mythic realms" (SGCB 35)⁵. And, at the deepest level of 'The Offers', in which Sylvia represents the Goddess and Ted, her consort⁶, Ted drew on myths which were probably amongst the earliest he ever encountered and lay deepest in his memory.

In 1964⁷, Ted wrote of the deities of these Northern mythologies as "an essential part of our instinct and imagination", and as being "much deeper in us, and truer to us, than the Greek-Roman pantheons". "One has only to look at our vocabulary", he continued, "to see where our mental life has its roots, where the paths to and from our genuine imaginations run, clearly enough." (WP 41 – 2). So, it is not surprising that these Northern deities should have surfaced in his imagination when he was dealing with Chokmah's creative powers, and the control which Binah has over them.

One of the most puzzling images in 'The Offers' - that of Ted "kicking free" from "the bottom of the Rhine" – suggests that the mythic parallel which Ted had in mind as he wrote this poem was that of Siegfried and his encounter with the nixies or water-sprites, who are the Rhinemaidens in Wagner's telling of this tale in his Ring cycle.

The underlying quest pattern of the Northern myths of which Siegfried is the hero, is essentially the same as that of the Cabbalistic quest⁸, but the connections of both with 'The Offers' are veiled. Ted's mention of the Rhine, however, at the central point of his poem, comes at a time when he was separated from his first true love, just as Siegfried was when the Rhinemaidens beguiled him from the depths of their river. Ted, too, was now "courted...covertly" by a woman who seemed wholly real: yet she was also Sylvia / "you" / the Goddess, and she "moved easily" in the "underworld", and had "other spirits" who "colluded" with her "in a support team". In her eyes Ted saw a "Ferocity of longing" for something which (like the stolen Rhinegold) had been "repossessed". But rejecting her "gentle ultimatum", Ted, like Siegfried, "kicked free" of these female energies which enticed and "bewildered" him.

Once again, as in 'The City', this word 'bewildered' is important, and suggests that Ted was on the edge of an Abyss which, in the context of Chokmah, would be a desert devoid of creative energies. So, the offer he was being made was not as seemingly simple as the story-level of the poem suggests. At a deeper level, he was being offered a choice between succumbing to "the inertia of life's momentum" and giving up the difficult path of his poetic quest; or of recognising that to do this would simply be to repeat old patterns, "same masks, same parts, / No matter who the actors". Just as Siegfried's encounter with the nixies was a test of his courage and of the strength and purity of his love, so Ted's second encounter with Sylvia's spirit was a test of his ability to discriminate between illusion and Truth; a test of his strength of will; and a test of the selflessness of the love which had, up to that time, guided him on his quest.

The traditional mythical and magical initiation of any hero requires that three such ordeals must be faced, and, as Ted truly believed and stated in 'The Offers', "Everything is offered three times". In a Cabbalistic context 'everything' encompasses the whole, the Unity, which is the goal of the Cabbalistic quest. And in 'The Offers', Sylvia's spirit does challenge Ted three times and three is the number of the Goddess, Binah.

With this in mind, the three manifestations of Sylvia's spirit in 'The Offers' resemble, respectively, the "yellowish", "morgue"-touched Goddess of Death-in-Life and Life-in-Death; the mature, experienced, motherly Goddess; and the Virgin Goddess who is "half wild roe", "flawless, priceless", and whose colour is the "cobalt" blue of the pure Spirit.

An offer always suggests a choice, and Ted's first encounter with Sylvia's spirit in 'The Offers' also had elements of testing and choice about it. This encounter took place two months after Sylvia's death, so the month was April, which is the natural and mythological time for rebirth in the Northern hemisphere. Realistically, Ted's experience was just like the sudden glimpse of a dead loved one which is not uncommon amongst the newly bereaved. But although rationally Ted knew that the woman he saw was not Sylvia – that this was "plainly impossible" – the uncanny conviction that Sylvia was present, that this dream "was no dream", and that some offer was being made to him, caused him to respond as if to a test. In fact, he described this revelation of Sylvia's spirit as being (and his line is wonderfully ambiguous) "For my examination and approval".

But what was being examined? His ability to discriminate between dream and reality? The strength of his spirit's will over hers as he tried to "manifest" himself and force her physically to notice him? His "daring" – the courage to speak to her or to "make some effort to seize / This offer"? Convinced as he was that Sylvia was there, but wearing "a new face", he still hesitated, bargained with "death" who seemed to have made this revelation, and set his own "testing moment".

Clearly, Ted was not wholly taken in and, however real this experience felt, he was still able to discriminate between Sylvia's "face" and "the new face" that this "saddened

substitute" wore. But his sense of loss was no less acute as he was left alone again with the "original emptiness" he had experienced that first time when Sylvia had "been" in his world and then "abruptly" was not.

There are veiled suggestions of Norse myth, too, about this first offer. Realistically, since the Northern Line on London's Underground network does run North, Sylvia's seeming reincarnation disappeared "Northwards". But the North is also the frozen, sunless realm of the Norse Goddess, Frigga, from whose cauldron poets and heroes are reborn. And Frigga's cauldron appears again in the final poem of Ted's journey on the Averse Tree.

The second "offer" and the Goddess's second testing of her chosen one was as disturbing, disorientating and hallucinatory as the first, and just as real. Again, Ted experienced the "doubled alive and dead existence", "the dream...that was no dream".

Ted's response to the first offer had been emotional, and his bargaining for time purely instinctive. The lack of response of that first woman, plus the finality of her disappearance, had been harsh and painful to him. With the second offer, his response was more rational, and experience and "thought" made him question the situation, so, "gasping for air" but still with difficulty and uncertainty, "indolently like somebody drowning", he had "kicked free". This second time, the woman responded with more understanding, as if Sylvia (who is always also the Goddess) had gently and with "ghostly humour" allowed him to remain, like "a hostage" in the "land of the dead": until, presumably, some payment had been made which would set him free.

The land of the dead, is both the illusory, dream world of Maya which Ted described as "the whole of London's waking life", and the darkness of Ted's own spirit after Sylvia's death. Together, as Ted has suggested throughout Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers, he and Sylvia had sought, through their creations, to heal themselves and their world. Sylvia's death ended this shared endeavour. But it did not end Ted's own quest. Following his rejection of this second 'offer', in lines which are clearly metaphorical, since at no time was Court Green "in ruins", Ted described their shared poetic journey as "our house". And he described how, after Sylvia's death, "even in dreams" all that they had built together seemed to fall apart and his own painful poetic attempts to continue the journey alone seemed doomed to failure. He needed, first, to heal himself by understanding all that had happened, but for many years he was unable to deal directly with this task.

In one of his last letters to Keith Sagar (18 June 1998)⁹, Ted discussed this failure to deal with "that part of my life" until Birthday Letters, and he provided a broad outline of his earlier attempts. Shortly after Sylvia's death he wrote 'The Howling of Wolves' and 'Song of a Rat', then nothing "but rubbishy efforts, radio plays, prose" until he "found a way out of a three year impasse with 'Skylarks'". After that the Crow poems began to arrive, until the deaths of Assia and Shura revived memories of Sylvia's death and his mother's death and caused "a big psychological meltdown with accidental complicating factors which knocked Crow off his perch."

Ambiguously, Ted described his work with Peter Brook shortly after this as an “escape”. Whether he meant that it was an escape from his own darkness is not clear, but it did entail, he said, “total suspension of my own writing except for that little myth of sinister import and total inner stasis, Prometheus on his Crag...”. The imaginative stimulus of working with Brook however, did lead to *Cave Birds* which, in a much earlier letter¹⁰, Ted described as having put him “through a process in a therapeutic way”. Then came *Remains of Elmet* and *River*, in both of which he immersed himself in the Mother Goddess’s world of Nature in order to confront death, deal with discordant energies and, so, achieve some kind of rebirth¹¹.

All of this suggests that The Goddess did demand attention from Ted at various times in his life and that by allowing her to guide and focus his creative energies in his poetry he did find therapeutic relief.

Perhaps, then, *Remains of Elmet* and *River* coincided with Ted’s second encounter with Sylvia’s spirit, as described in ‘The Offers’. Certainly, both sequences deal closely with the Mother Goddess and the cyclical manifestation of her powers here on Earth. *Remains of Elmet* begins with Ted’s evocation of the spirit of his own mother in a poem which, in the later publication, *Elmet*, is entitled ‘The Dark River’. And it is ‘The Mothers’ and all their energies (literal, metaphorical, alchemical, mythic etc.) which prevail in both sequences¹².

In *Remains of Elmet*, the energies of Binah predominate: in *River*, those of Chokmah, which are often symbolized by a river, are most apparent. Nevertheless, in the poetry of both sequences Ted immersed himself and his readers in the Goddess’s world, waded into his own subconscious, participated imaginatively in birth and death, and, finally, glimpsed “the nameless”¹³ which unifies all.

Artape

The Goddess with whom Ted negotiated in *Remains of Elmet* and *River*, like the Goddess embodied in the second woman in ‘The Offers’, was the Goddess of our world. She was Nature, who connects all the creative energies of our world to the Divine Source through the Golden Chain of being, as in Robert Fludd’s illustration¹⁴. Ted’s glimpse of the nameless came through his connection with her, but awe-inspiring as it was, it was fleeting, and he quickly returned to the world of Nature, ending *River* with words in which his vision is beautifully condensed, like dew on “old haws”.

Some time in 1980, Ted wrote to Keith Sagar that *River* was “finished more or less”. And in 1981 he wrote that he was “involved in the coils of the Plath journals” and that his own “compositions” had “been in hibernation...for pretty well a year” (TLOF xxviii¹⁵). About this time, too, he described his own writing as “some sort of fight for life”, a fight which was so “important” that as soon as he came “to the second wind and fresh shot of revision” it drew him back in until he was “gasping for air”¹⁶. For whatever reason, after *River*, Ted kicked free of his immersion in poetic negotiations with the Goddess and wrote, as he told Sagar, “for 5 or 6 years nothing but prose – nothing but burning the

foxes”¹⁷.

By 1991, Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being was published and Ted told Baskin that he had emerged from the “Shakespeare tar-pit” wondering “what verse” he would be able “to produce now, after all that”¹⁸. Translation got him “off [his] own rails” for a while, he told Keith Sagar, but this was “all done by 1994”. At this point, it seems, Sylvia / the Goddess again demanded his attention and he began, as he told me in 1995, to write about things he “should have resolved thirty years ago. Should have written then, but couldn’t”.

For the first time, then, he dealt directly with those things, and in 1995 he told me that he had written “about 100 poems”, a few of which he allowed to be published in his New Selected Poems. Was this the “testing foot” which he lowered “into the running bath” in ‘The Offers’? Was this when he heard the familiar voice “urgently” demanding “Don’t fail me”? “Finally”, he wrote to Keith Sagar, “I cracked. I got together all the Birthday Letters, wrote some more – with mighty relief, and...published them”¹⁹.

All the feelings which Ted went on to express about those Birthday Letters poems in his letter to Sagar – that they were “so raw, so vulnerable, so un-processed, so naïve, so self-exposing and unguarded” – all are summed up in that image of his “helpless moment” in ‘The Offers’. Yet the moment when Ted first stripped away all masks and prepared to immerse himself, naked, in episodes from his and Sylvia’s past; to re-create them as fully as possible in his imagination; and to record them in his poems, was equally his “helpless moment”. And the last time Sylvia’s spirit revealed itself to him in ‘The Offers’, she not only appeared as the Virgin Goddess, the Goddess of Love to whom all Cabbalistic poetry is dedicated, she also came in a manner which has many mythological precedents.

The bath, always, in mythology and religion is a place of ritual purification or baptism. It is a threshold where, symbolically, worldly things are washed away so that the spiritual life may begin. It is a place of transformation and rebirth, and a place where one is naked and most helpless. Many mythic kings and heroes were killed in their baths ²⁰. So, this third and “last time” that Ted heard the familiar voice out of the temporal “river’s uproar”, it came with warning associations which he was well equipped to recognize, just as he recognized its “peremptory” and “urgent” command.

At this point in Ted’s life, and in his Cabbalistic journey, he was prepared for the self-purification, purging and intensification of purpose which is required at the Cabbalists’ ‘Third Gate’, through which he needed to pass in order to reach the inner Temple and find the Truth and wholeness that he sought.

In the Cabbalistic journey which Ted undertook in Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers, he tried his utmost not to fail either Sylvia or the Goddess. And, as ‘The Offers’ suggests, in his necessary dealings with the Averse energies in Howls & Whispers, whilst the demons of Chokmah (the Chaigidel or Hinderers) tempted him with spurious offers designed to deceive and distract him from his quest, ultimately they

served only to test his readiness for the task. This, then, was the light which Ted salvaged in 'The Offers' from the Qlippothic darkness of Chokmah.

Kether

'Superstitions'

(H & W 11, THCP 1183).

Kether: Sephira 1: Crown. Fire

Element: -

Planet: The First Swirlings (The Big Bang).

Qlippothic Sphere of The Triple Hell.

Virtue: Attainment. Completion of The Great Work.

Vice: -

Illusion: Attainment.

Qlippoth: Futility.

'Superstitions' (H & W 11) is the final poem in Howls & Whispers and it lies as Sephira 1, Kether, at the crown of the Averse Tree.

In Ted's typescript list of poems²¹ and in the proof copies of Howls & Whispers, 'Superstitions' is numbered as poem 11. Eleven is the number of the 'Accursed Shells' of the Averse Tree²² and it is a most powerful prime number, a Cabbalist's 'master' number and the great "general number of magic, or energy tending to change"²³. It combines antitheses, "embraces the opposites in both heaven and hell" (SSN 97)²⁴; and its energies can be used by the Adept to "bind all opposites together, each to its complement" (SSN 96) in order to bring everything to equilibrium. All of which is appropriate for the final poem of Ted's Cabbalistic journey.

Eleven also amplifies all the powers of 1: and 1 is the Monad, the All in "latency or suspension" (SSN 1) from which all of the manifest world proceeds. Everything begins at 1, as it did in Birthday Letters and ends at 1, as it now does in Howls & Whispers. And if Ted had successfully dealt with all the energies, positive and averse, and had passed the necessary tests set by the Goddess, then this final poem should have allowed him to complete his quest, to unite Wisdom and Understanding in the light of the Divine Source, and to bring his 'Great Work' to completion.

The position of 'Superstitions', therefore, as poem 11, at Sephira 1 (Kether) at the Crown of the Averse Tree, and as the poem which completes Ted's poetic Cabbalistic journey round that Tree, is one of supreme importance. Why then, if 11 is so powerful and its amplification of 1 so great, did Ted invoke the powers of 13 in this poem?

Certainly, "Friday the thirteenth" is widely perceived as a combination of day and date which is full of portent. Yet, neither this, nor superstitions in general, nor the fragmentary references to myth, religion and history in the poem, seem to have much to do with the story Ted has told so far in Howls & Whispers.

This story, as in *Birthday Letters*, tells of Ted's and Sylvia's meeting and marriage, and of Sylvia's death and its consequences. But, clearly, 'Superstitions' was important to Ted in contexts other than that of his life with Sylvia, for he also used it as the first poem in *Capriccio*²⁵, the limited edition of twenty poems about Assia Wevill. What, then, might Friday the thirteenth mean which makes it relevant to both sequences?

Thirteen, as any dictionary of symbols will confirm, is a numinous number, one which indicates the presence of a god, and it is both lucky and unlucky. It is the number associated with the Sacred Kings and sacrificed gods; with the end of corrupt worlds and the creation of new; with the Hanged Man of the Tarot; and with Mem, which is the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and represents the Sacred Feminine.

In Cabbala, 13 (represented as numerals, rather than by letters) unites the undifferentiated energies of 1 (Kether) with the form-giving energies of 3 (Binah). And in Cabbalistic magic 13, like 11, is uniquely powerful, for in Cabbalistic lore "Through the proper assemblage of the forces of 12 and 1, or 13, 'All the forces of heaven and earth are given unto you'". (SSN 105). And 13 also represents "either death through failure and degradation, or the attainment in regeneration of a New Order of the Ages. There are no halfway measures with 13, it demands all or nothing" (SSN 106).

The relevance of this last quotation to the regenerative quest of the Cabbalist, and the way in which the patterns it describes are demonstrated in the particular stories of myth, religion and history to which Ted refers in 'Superstitions', is readily apparent to those who know those stories²⁶. Each of the god-heroes Ted chose – Balder, Christ and Columbus – came from a corrupt world to offer a vision of a new, golden, uncorrupted place – a 'New Order of Ages'. But each was destroyed by the dark energies of the world around them. And it is this inseparable combination of contrary energies in our world (light-darkness, Sun-Moon, Male-Female, good-evil) that 13 also represents.

Crowley, using a Cabbalistic method based on the numerical value of Hebrew letters, drew on the *Sefer Yetzirah*²⁷ to demonstrate that 13 is "ACHD, Unity" and "AHBH, Love" ('Gematria', 777, p. 29), and also "Hated, AIB" and "Emptiness, BHV" ('Sepher Sephiroth', 777, p. 2). And the double aspect of 13, which is reflected in these words, is also present in the powerful Qlippothic demons, the Thaumiel ('The Two Contending Forces', 'The Twin Gods') which occupy the apex of the Averse Tree and are described as 'The Bicephalous Ones'.

Baskin's accompanying etching for 'Superstitions' in *Howls & Whispers*, captures exactly the united but double nature of 13 in an image of a single head on which two faces appear in profile.

"Friday", too, has its own magical significance, for Friday is Freyja's day, the day of the most powerful of the Norse Goddesses, who is yet another form of Binah. Ted, by threefold repetition of her name in the first two lines of 'Superstition', invoked the Goddess's presence in his poem and, thus, in our world; and he invoked her "Today", which is the continuous and immediate present.

It is apparent that “Friday” and “thirteen” together combine all the associated powers of each. And this power must be magnified at the Apex of the Tree, where the Supernal Triangle of Sephirothic energies prevail. Friday the thirteenth, therefore, is a date to stand in awe of – which was the original meaning of ‘superstition’²⁸.

Ted’s poem is full of gods and heroes of whom we have stood in awe, and with whom we have associated Friday the thirteenth in myth, folk-lore and fable. And it warns of the terrible, blind foolishness of ignoring or laughing at our superstitions.

Figuratively, and Cabbalistically (in its line numbers), ‘Superstitions’ charts our descent into increasingly worldly and inflexible representations of the human search for Truth. It moves from the creation, death and burial of our earliest, primordial ancestor (lines 1, 2); to our earliest, imaginative explanations of the world (lines 3, 4, 5); next, to the fixing of our ideas about occult power in the dogma of religion (lines 6, 7)²⁹; and, finally (lines 8, 9, 10, 11), at the lowest, most worldly level of the Tree and completing the Qlippothic pattern, to our creation of human heroes, who, like Christopher Columbus, physically and rationally discover ‘Truth’ for us by exploring the world geographically or scientifically.

Similarly, ‘Superstitions’ charts the progressive lowering of our spiritual horizons, as our vision of the redemption and healing of our corrupt world, and the achievement of a new and more harmonious life, becomes increasingly unimaginative, codified, inflexible and Earth-bound.

Ted’s poem, however, does not end at line 11 but continues on for another 17 lines in which the unpredictable, “two-faced” energies of 8 ($17 = 1 + 7 = 8$) prevail.

Eight is not just the number of Mercury as the eighth planet, and of Hermes-Mercury who is the spirit which moves between our world and the world of the gods, it is also the number of “the feminine in exultation”, the “Double feminine” (SSN 66). And the Goddess is double aspected, “two-faced” in many ways. She is the gatekeeper who controls the supernal energies which flow into our world; her Judgment, too, like that of Frigga in Valhalla, determines who from amongst us will be allowed to access the immortal energies of the Source. From Frigga’s cauldron, dead heroes were reborn to live with the gods in Valhalla: so, too, may the Cabbalistic hero be chosen by the Goddess to receive the “gift” of spiritual rebirth. In 13, she stands beside Kether, united by Love. But to Cabbalists, 13, is also 10 plus 3, and Binah is then known as ‘The Bride of Malkuth’ (10, the World) and their union is like the “root with the fruit” (MQ 141): then, she is Nature, the Mother of all Living, and the Moon Goddess. Her number, 3, represents the lit, visible side of her moon-face. Joined to its mirror image, 3 becomes 8, the Mercurial Spirit and the Double Feminine.

In two groups of three lines (12 – 14 and 15 – 17), Ted first brought Freyja into the world with “Friday the thirteenth” and connected her energies by a highly ambiguous “you” to Sylvia, himself and us; then, he joined Frigga (the same Goddess but in her role as

guardian of birth, death and transfiguration) to her cauldron in Valhalla “where human warriors were reborn”. Essentially, these six lines show the Goddess in her two roles; as 13, the supernal “Prestidigitateur” who controls the flow of Supernal energies into our world; and as 3 married to 10, ‘The Bride of Malkuth’ who sits “on the Throne of Binah” (MQ 141) and controls our human access to the Source. Also, in these six lines Ted performs the function of the Mercurial Magus by bringing the spiritual and material worlds together.

This is the most he can do. The Goddess, whose energies are those of Judgment, “may” or may not “find odds and ends” for us, for him or for Sylvia; and “maybe”, like Frigga, she will choose us for rebirth. In her cold, lit, moon-face, only a single eye (which, symbolically, is always the Divine “I” which denotes all godly powers) is visible. But hidden in its shadowed corner, under the epicanthic fold³⁰, we may glimpse her magical cauldron.

In the version of this poem which begins the Capriccio sequence, Ted instructs us to “imagine the bride’s mirror”; to imagine, in other words, the hidden, mirror side of the Moon-Goddess’s face. Imagine it, he directs, “In the form of a cauldron. Call it a cauldron / of the soul’s rebirth”.

In both poems, the seven lines which immediately follow are identical.

What we will see, if we use our imagination to look beyond the physical veil, is not an arbitrary process but one in which the fate of each individual – “this one”, “that one”, “this other one” – is determined. Like Frigga, the Goddess judges us. “This one” (who has passed the tests which questing heroes must pass) may find eternal life; “that one” may be reborn on Earth as so still subject to death; “this other” remains in the chaos of swirling, undifferentiated, unformed energies in the cauldron – unborn and, so, “without a cry”.

“You will be laughed at / For your superstition”, Ted wrote in the Capriccio version of this poem, choosing the spacing and line breaks so as to emphasize this warning. But in *Howls & Whispers* he is uncharacteristically forceful and directive: “Let them laugh / At your superstition”. Again these two lines are given particular emphasis by his spacing and line breaks; and they also stand free of the lines which follow thus giving them even greater importance.

In both versions of the poem, the final two lines are identical; and in both poems they are enclosed in parentheses, so that they appear as if they are an afterthought, an almost casual comment separated from the rest of the poem. Their content, however, is far from casual. And the images Ted draws in them are of happenings which are un-natural, inexplicable and terrifying – exactly the sort of thing which would provoke the fear and awe which define superstition.

Appropriate as this may be, there is far more to these final lines than is immediately apparent, and the key word in them is “Remembering”.

Remembering, for Cabbalists and NeoPlatonic Hermeticists is exactly that: re-membering – putting back together the scattered and separated parts of a body in order to make it whole again. Memory and imagination, they believe, link us directly to the Divine³¹. Remembering requires us to use our will, our courage and our determination to find and gather those separated parts, then to use our imagination to re-create and re-vivify the whole.

Remembering is what Ted has tried to make us do throughout this poem, by providing fragments of stories in symbols and names, and by creating suggestive patterns to remind us of our origins and of our various ways of interpreting the world and seeking Truth.

Remembering is what Ted did throughout Birthday Letters; what he did as he searched for light amongst the Qlipothic fragments in Howls & Whispers; and what he did also in the Capriccio sequence, which begins with ‘Superstitions’ and ends with him finding the keys of the sycamore, which is the Goddess’s Tree of Life.

Remembering requires our awareness that whilst the Whole unites all contraries, in our fallen world - the world controlled by Nature - the energies become increasingly divided and polarized. We must remember and accept that the contraries - life and death, light and darkness, laughter and sorrow – are each part of a spectrum in which both are always present. As the thirteenth century scholar, Boncompagno, stated most emphatically “WE MUST ASSIDUOUSLY REMEMBER THE INVISIBLE JOYS OF PARADISE AND THE ETERNAL TORMENT OF HELL”[sic.]³².

In ‘Superstitions’ Ted makes the same warning. And he goes further. He tells us that remembering is not easy: that it will make you sweat, burn and bleed. If you seek wholeness, you must know and accept this, even if others laugh at your superstition. For, as Blake so beautifully put it in his “Pickering” manuscript:

Man was made for Joy & Woe,
And when this we rightly know,
Thro’ the World we safely go.

Joy & Woe are woven fine,
A Clothing for the Soul divine;
Under every grief & pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.

So, finally, in ‘Superstitions’ Ted brought together all the fragments of light he could find amongst the Qlipothic shells of the Averse Tree and, in the presence of the Goddess and with her help, he completed this remembering: for Sylvia, for himself and for us.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. This sketch (dated “26.F.98”), together with other preparatory sketches for this poem

and for the rest of the poems in *Howls & Whispers*, is amongst the Baskin-Hughes papers in the British Library.

2. On a second sketch for this poem the title is 'Moon list'. Baskin's writing is clear and the way he forms his letters is generally consistent and easy to read and interpret.

3. Ted returns to this image in the final poem of *Howls & Whispers*, where Frigga, the Norse goddess of fertility tends her cauldron.

4. Binah's cheek is also one half of the face of the united Supernals (Binah-Chokmah) who, together with Kether (The Crown) form the head of Universal Man, Adam Kadmon, and represent the highest level of consciousness (MQ 47)

5. Binah and Chokmah live just such busy lives: as All Mother and All Father, Queen and King, Heroine and Hero, etc. in many world mythologies. The Cabbalistic theme of unbalanced energies, a fallen world, a bleeding hero, and a barren land which requires the union of Male and Female energies to restore it to fertility, similarly has many mythic parallels.

6. Such complementary male-female energies were part of Ted's and Sylvia's shared mythology. Sylvia wrote of Ted in her journal as "a god" whom she "had conjured" from the sea "for my earth goddess, he the sun, the sea, the black complement power: yang to yin.". (SPJ 17 July 1957).

7. 'Asgard for the Addict', Ted's review of E.O.G Turville-Petre's, *Myths and Religions of the North* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1964) was published in *The Listener*, 19 March 1964.

8. In the *Nibelunglied*, the Rhinegold is the magical source of harmony. The lust of those who seek to own it, however, causes chaos and evil in the world of the gods. So, the World Tree dies; the Spring of Wisdom dries up; and gods and humans and their worlds are destroyed. Brunhilde and Siegfried, are the heroine and hero whose true love restores the balance so that the World Tree can grow again. But Siegfried, like all heroes, must first be tested to prove the strength and purity of his love.

9. Held amongst the Hughes-Sagar correspondence at The British Library.

10. Hughes-Sagar correspondence, 21 April 1977.

11. My own book, *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest*, examines in detail Ted's attempts achieve this rebirth through the poetry and the *Alchemy of Cave Birds*, *Remains of Elmet* and *River*.

12. *Elmet*, published in 1985, includes some poems which were not in *Remains of Elmet* and it differs from the earlier publication in the order of poems and in the underlying purpose of the sequence (Ted discussed this difference in purpose with me

in 1985, and in a letter to Keith Sagar that same year he wrote of the effort he was making to include “more of my own feelings (as distinct from my mother’s)”
Hughes-Sagar correspondence, 28. Aug. 1985.

13. ‘Salmon Eggs’, R 120, THCP 680.

14. Robert Fludd, ‘Mirror of all nature and symbol of art’, *Utrisque Cosmi*, Vol. 1. 1672.

15. Sagar, K. *The Laughter of Foxes*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000.

16. Hughes-Sagar correspondence, 11 April 1981.

17. Hughes-Sagar correspondence, 18 June 1998.

18. Baskin-Hughes mss. in the British Library, letter dated 15 August 1991.

19. Hughes-Sagar correspondence, 18 April 1998.

20. King Minos was murdered in his bath; Osiris was trapped in his coffin and thrown into the river; and the flawed King, Agamemnon, was stabbed by Clytemnestra as he stepped from the “ritual bath”, “taken by surprise, / naked, helpless”, as Ted described it in his version of *The Oresteia* (O 54).

21. Baskin-Hughes mss. The British Library.

22. Crowley, ‘Gematria’, 777, p. 28.

23. *Ibid.* p. 43.

24. SSN = Helene, C. *The Sacred Science of Numbers*, DeVorss Publications, Marina del Rey, CA, 1997.

25. *Capriccio*, Poems by Ted Hughes. Illustrated by Leonard Baskin, The Gehenna Press. Part of the final page of each copy reads: “Fifty copies of *Capriccio* were issued in the unsettled Spring of 1990”. ‘Superstitions’ in *Capriccio* varies in only a very minor way from ‘Superstitions’ in *Howls & Whispers*.

26. In Hebrew-Muslim tradition, Adam was created, cast out of paradise and died on a Friday. Loki, was the thirteenth god present when Balder, son of Odin and Freyja, was killed by the shaft of “spermy mistletoe” which Loki tricked blind Hoder into throwing. Balder’s death presaged the end of the corrupt world and the birth of a new, fertile and just world for gods and Man. Christ’s death, too, presages the Day of Judgment and the salvation of Mankind, and in Christian fable, his crucifixion took place on Friday the thirteenth. And Friday the thirteenth is, traditionally, the day on which Christopher Columbus first ‘found’ the New World of America and glimpsed a golden, “perfumed” paradise where people were naked, innocent and sinless. Bound by the chains of his

own corrupt society, he brought that world slavery and death.

27. The Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Formation), the oldest known cabbalistic text, is believed to date back to the fourth century AD. Words chosen from it which have similar numerical values are considered to be explanatory of each other.

28. 'Superstition' "[OF, f. L super(stitionem f. stare stat-stand) perh. orig.= standing over in awe]"(COD), later came to mean "unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown, mysterious or imaginary, esp. in connection with religion". (SOED).

29. Appropriately, in Hebrew and Cabbalistic traditions, 6 is the number associated with the Virgin, and 7 with Christ or the sacrificed god.

30. An epicanthic fold is a fold of skin which covers the inner corner of the eye. It is a common facial feature amongst Asiatic peoples.

31. Francis Yates traces this belief in detail in The Art of Memory (Pimlico, London, 1960), and Ted knew her work well.

32. Ibid. AOM 71.

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Capriccio: The Path of the Sword

An analysis of Ted Hughes' use of Cabbala in Capriccio.

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(completed: 17 October 2007)

Capriccio 1:

Introduction

'Capriccios'

'The Locket'

'The Mythographers'

Capriccio 2:

'Systole-Diastole'

'Descent'

'Folktale'

Capriccio 3:

'Fanaticism'
'Snow'
'Rules of the Game'
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'The Pit and the Stones'
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'The Roof'
'The Error'
Capriccio 5:
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Valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional Poetry and Magic 3

Capriccio: The Path of the Sword.

Poetry and Magic 1 and 2 should be read first unless the reader already has a good understanding of the serious spiritual practice of Cabbala, and is familiar with the Cabbalistic Tree and the Tarot cards associated with its Paths.

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Title page

Introduction and 'Capriccios' (C 1)

Capriccio was first published as a beautifully illustrated, leather bound, limited edition of fifty books in the "unsettled Spring of 1990"¹. Ted was in his sixtieth year, which, astrologically, marks the return of the planet Saturn to the position which it originally occupied in his birth-chart. As Ted would have known, this signifies "a point of reckoning, a crucial stage in our personal evolution... a time when boundaries are broken and outworn structures abandoned.". At sixty, this so-called 'Saturn Return' "marks our passage to being an elder"².

Cabbalistically, too, 60 (6 x 10) shows the Goddess's powers as doubled and directed through Tiphereth (6 – Love) at the heart of the Tree, in such a way that Malkuth (10 – The World) is joined to the Source³. This particular Path, on the Pillar of Equilibrium, is the Path of the Arrow which a Cabbalist will take at the completion of the Great Work.

Astrologically and Cabbalistically, therefore, it was appropriate that Ted should have chosen his sixtieth year to begin to deal with the events in his life which, as he told me when he first spoke about these poems, he "should have dealt with earlier, but couldn't"⁴.

In 1995, eight poems from Capriccio and eight poems from Birthday Letters were included in a selection of 'Uncollected' poems in Ted Hughes: New Selected Poems 1951-1994. Birthday Letters and a small limited edition of poems, called Howls &

Whispers, were not published until 1998, eight years after *Capriccio* first appeared. All three sequences, *Capriccio*, *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*, were not published together until five years after Ted's death, when they appeared in Ted Hughes: *Collected Poems* in 2003. Even then, the *Capriccio* poems were separated from the other two sequences by more than 200 pages. So, apart from that first linking in 1995 of these poems about Assia Wevill with poems about Sylvia Plath, there was little but the biographical nature of the poems to suggest that all three sequences were part of one complete cycle, or that the *Capriccio* poems might have been a necessary part of Ted's Cabbalistic journey.

Other things also hid this link from the casual observer⁵. Ted chose to publish both *Capriccio* and *Howls & Whispers* as finely bound, expensive, strictly limited editions, which included original woodcuts and etchings by his friend Leonard Baskin and were published by Baskin's Gehenna Press. A gap of eight years separated the appearance of these two books. Few people, therefore, were in a position to notice that the first poem of *Capriccio* (entitled 'Capriccios') was, with only the smallest of changes, identical with the last poem of *Howls & Whispers* ('Superstitions').

Carol Bere did note this and she wrote that *Capriccio*, *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers* could "be viewed as fragments of one long sequence or, more accurately, as separate, although interrelated sequences". She noted the circular pattern of the sequences, too, and saw this as suggesting "the impossibility of fulfilment of transforming or completed myth".

In Cabbala, however, quite the opposite is true. The completed circle marks the fulfilment of the Cabbalist's goal and the attainment of wholeness, harmony and rebirth. So, the repetition of a poem at the start of *Capriccio* and at the end of *Howls & Whispers* suggests that these two books were part of a single Cabbalistic journey which, in this case, also included *Birthday Letters*. The total number of poems in the three sequences (20 in *Capriccio*, 88 in *Birthday Letters*, and 11 in *Howls & Whispers*) is 119, which, in Cabbalistic numerology, reduces to 11, a Master Number which is "the great general number of magic or energy tending to change."⁶ The energies of 11 hold the power of "attainment, supremacy and mastership" and bind all opposites together to bring everything to equilibrium. And this is exactly what Ted was attempting to do as he used his will, his imagination and all his poetic, shamanic and Cabbalistic skills to re-member (in the literal and the common meaning of this word) his relationship with Assia and Sylvia.

The seemingly small differences between the first poem in *Capriccio* and the final poem of *Howls & Whispers* are significant, too, when the poems are seen as part of the same healing journey. "You will be laughed at for your superstitions" Ted warns in 'Capriccios' (C 1), at the start of the journey. But in 'Superstitions' (H&W 11), when his journey has been successfully completed, he is confident enough to scorn the opinion of others: "Let them laugh".

Ted certainly paid attention to superstitions. In a book review in 1964, he wrote: "The

major superstitions are impressive. They are so old, so unkillable and so few. If they are pure nonsense, why aren't there more of them? But they all keep reviving with the perverse air of intuitions, never losing their central idea, no matter how richly they proliferate in details." (WP 51). The change of title between the two poems encapsulates Ted's awareness that those who deal with supernatural powers (as a Cabbalist or shaman or even a priest must do) must pay attention to seemingly capricious nature which superstition attributes to them, and his final unconcern for those who regard superstitions as having no real foundation.

The only other difference between the two poems is similarly interesting. Speaking of Frigga, the great Norse Goddess whose presence he invokes in the opening lines of both poems by a threefold repetition of her name-day Friday (Freya's Day, or Frigga's Day), he issues the command in 'Capriccios' to "imagine the bride's mirror/ In the form of a cauldron". In the tradition of ritual magic, this command is made to all participants, including the speaker. "Call it", he instructs (again speaking to himself and us) "a cauldron / Of the soul's rebirth". Frigga is the Triple Goddess: Bride, Mother and Layer-Out. Her element is the sea (the cauldron of all the elements) the waters of which are associated with the human subconscious, the soul, and with life and death. In this first poem of Ted's journey, he invokes the Goddess as the bride into whose cauldron/mirror he is about to peer as he searches her waters, like his own creature, Wodwo, for roots, memories and understanding. In 'Superstitions', at the end of his journey, there is no such command, and Frigga's cauldron has become "The cauldron of Valhalla / where warriors [and perhaps poets who have completed the heroic journey] are reborn".

Everything I wrote about 'Superstitions' when I dealt with it in Poetry and Magic 2: Howls & Whispers applies equally to 'Capriccios'. At the start and at the completion of his journey, Ted invokes the Great Goddess in the person of Frigga, the Goddess of the Norse mythology which he believed to be "much deeper in us, and truer to us, than the Greek-Roman pantheons..." (WP 41). He summons her into our world "Today" (which is the immediate and continuous present), and he ensures her presence by repeating her name-day and the numinous number 13. In Cabbala, 13 is a supremely powerful number. It combines the energies of 1, 2 and 3 which, as the Supernal Triangle at the Crown of the Tree, represent the ever-flowing forces of the Source present in our world (SSN 105). It is the number of the Sacrificed King (the Hanged Man in the Tarot pack), and of the Sacred Feminine which is represented by the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet – Mem (water). The presence of Mem, written and heard in the words 'memory' and 'remember', is coincidental, but the poetic and magical power of its presence would not have been lost on Ted as he made his journey through Capriccio, Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers.

The title of the first poem of Ted's journey is 'Capriccios' which is the singular form of the word which Ted chose as the title for the whole sequence. Dictionary definitions of this word refer to an artistic work in free form, a musical improvisation, a work full of sudden changes, a freak, a fantasy. None of these definitions is appropriate, either for Ted's opening poem or for the whole sequence, both of which are carefully structured,

and serious in mood and theme. 'Capriccio', however, comes from seventeenth century Italian and is made up of 'capo' (meaning 'head') and 'riccio', (meaning 'hedgehog'). Hence, 'capo-riccio' means hedgehog-headed and describes a head with the hair standing on end. CapriccioThe images conjured up by this meaning are ones of surprise, shock, horror and terror. These are the images depicted, and elicited, by Goya's etchings Los Caprichos (The Caprices) (1793-1778). And similar nightmares and horrors pervade Ted's Capriccio poems and appear, too, in Baskin's accompanying illustrations.

Goya described Los Caprichos as "a criticism of human errors and vices" and his serious purpose was to make rational and satirical comment on the society in which he was living. In particular, the etching on which he included the comment, "The sleep of reason engenders monsters", reflects Ted's own purpose in Capriccio, although Ted's poems are not in any way satirical. The cats, owls, and bats which become creatures of nightmare and witchcraft as they loom from the darkness around the sleeping figure in Goya's etching are matched by the demons, monsters and skulls in Ted's poems and in Baskin's accompanying engravings. As are the elements of unexpected horror and death which pervade many of Goya's other Los Caprichos pictures and convey the monstrous, terrifying, topsy-turvy nature of a world where reason has been upset by human passion and folly.

CapriccioIt is easy to imagine that Ted, remembering his relationship with Assia, remembering their meeting and the turmoil of events which followed, remembering Sylvia's death, his own and Assia's chaotic emotions, and Assia and Shura's deaths, might interpret this as the result of the sleep of reason and, in particular, of his own irrational passions and folly. In the only Birthday Letters poem which refers to Assia, he described how "the dreamer in her" fell in love with "the dreamer" in him: and how "the dreamer" in him fell in love with her ('Dreamers'. BL 157-8). In 'The Pit and the Stones' in Capriccio, Ted writes of "his own weakness". And in 'Capriccios', he seems to suggest that the man and woman in the poem, as recipients of Frigga's "two-faced gift", were the pawns of capricious gods. In theory, one can always decline to accept a gift. But at least, if one fears offending the gods in this way, one must heed the traditional superstitious belief that the gods always require payment for their gifts. Whether or not Ted and Assia were the pawns of capricious gods, the fact is that he and Assia did fall in love and that everything in Capriccio portrays that love as the sleep of reason and their mutual immersion in a sometimes nightmarish dream.

Yet, the Cabbalistic structure of the Capriccio sequence suggests that these poems had a purpose beyond that of simply depicting the turmoil caused by irrational passions.

If Capriccio was the first stage of Ted's Cabbalistic journey, then there was a compelling and highly rational magical purpose to his recollection (and re-collection) of all the events, passions, turbulence and terrors of his years with Assia. It is related to a Pathway on the Cabbalistic Tree which is known as the Path of the Sword and it maps a journey which needs to be taken before the Path of Wisdom (which Ted followed in Birthday Letters) and The Path of the Snake (which Ted undertook in Howls &

Whispers) are attempted.

The Path of the Sword follows the Lightning Flash down the Sephirothic Tree, from Sephira to Sephira, starting at Kether (1) and ending at Malkuth (10). This journey is made in the World of Assiah, and it is made by a so-called 'Crowned Magician' whose crown represents "the attainment of his Work"⁷, and also, most importantly, the 'Crown' of Supernal energies made by Sephiroth 1, 2 and 3 at the top of the Sephirothic Tree.

The Cabbalist's Sword is "Reason...the analytical faculty", which is used to cut through "the complexity and chaos caused in the heart". It must be thrust into the Cabbalist's own heart to free "the perceptions from the Web of emotion". Only in this way can the simple truth be separated from the distorting emotions which may obscure the clear perception of it.

Before any important Cabbalistic journey is undertaken, it is advisable, first, to take The Path of the Sword in order to strike terror into and dominate any 'demons' (or disrupting, distorting thoughts and emotions) which might break the continuous progress (or circle) of that journey. In the words of the respected Jewish scholar of Cabbala, Gershom Scholem, the "ritual elimination of negative factors that disturb the right order" is of utmost importance and, particularly in Lurianic Cabbala, the purpose of many rituals is to control the qlippothic demonic and satanic powers of "the other side", which are "at present mixed with all things and destroy them from within"⁸.

Regardless of any Cabbalistic purpose, it is understandable that Ted should have chosen to deal separately with the emotional years of his relationship with Assia before immersing himself in memories of his life with Sylvia. In this way, he could allow each woman her own poetic sequence and her own story. Had he not done this, the revival of strong emotions as he wrote the poems and recalled, re-created and re-lived the emotional turmoil of the period when Assia first entered his and Sylvia's lives, might well have prevented him from completing the sequence. At the very least, his judgment would have been clouded and the sort of balanced view of all that had happened which he sought to achieve might well have been impossible. So, in *Capriccio*, Ted attempted to bring all possible emotional 'demons' under control before he embarked on what, for him, was clearly the most difficult and dangerous task of remembering Sylvia.

The evidence that *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers* record Ted's Cabbalistic journey towards balance, harmony and wholeness is very strong, as I have shown in my analysis of these sequences. So, too, is the possibility that *Capriccio* represents his preparatory journey along the Path of the Sword. And it is of special interest in this respect that in his *New Selected Poems* Ted changed the word 'canticles' in 'The Locket' (C 2) to 'Song of Songs', thereby specifically referring to a cantic which has very special meaning for Cabbalists and, in particular, for those who are of Jewish descent, as Assia was.

The poems in *Capriccio* are dark and difficult poems, peopled by gods and goddesses from many mythologies, and Ted deliberately chose to deal with their darkest most

demonic powers. But the tone of the poems is noticeably firmer, sharper and more consistently objective than it is in *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*⁹. Ted does not describe Assia: only her voice and her clothes. Nor does he conjure or evoke her in the way he constantly conjures Sylvia in *Birthday Letters*, picturing her brilliant-eyed at the birth of her child; bent at her desk writing; sitting amongst the daffodils. As in *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*, the woman in *Capriccio* is not named but is 'you', 'she' or 'her', a device which hides individual identity and, as in Ted's very early poem 'Song' (THCP 24) allows him to conflate the woman with the Muse/Goddess whose energies (as Ted believed) all women embody. Occasionally, 'you' seems to be used by the narrator as a form of self-address and/or to include the reader or hearer of the poem, which further hinders specific identification of the addressee. At times, too, the narrator distances himself even further from the events, and 'you' and 'I' become 'she' and 'he'.

These distancing measures also allow *Capriccio* to be less of a personal, 'confessional', indulgence and more like a myth in which readers may recognize some elements as reflections of their own experiences. So, *Capriccio*, like *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*, may become "your story, my story" and include us in Ted's poetic, Cabbalistic and shamanic ritual.Sword

All of these devices may be seen as Ted's deliberate and rational way of cutting through the emotional turmoil which the revival of personal memories must bring. But the creation and wielding of the Cabbalistic Sword also requires the utmost balance and care, as the metaphorical description of the Sword suggests. Its double-edged blade must be made of steel, the metal of Mars: so, it is used with strength and ruthlessness. To balance this, the hilt must be of Copper, the metal of Venus; and the guard shaped like her two crescent moons, waxing and waning: so Love must be the motive and the guide of its use. Figuratively placed point-down on the Sephirothic Tree, the pommel of the Sword is in Da'ath (the hidden Sephira, Knowledge); the guard extends horizontally from Chesed (4) to Geburah (5) to combine Mercy and Severity; and the point rests in Malkuth (10). The 'Crown' of the Supernal Triangle must remain above the Cabbalist's head to guide each individual action. If this balance of strength, love and guidance is not present, then the Cabbalist, as he plunges the Sword into his own heart, will destroy himself.

All of this, I must repeat, is imaginative metaphor for the task which must be undertaken by all who seek Truth. It complies with the fundamental spiritual command to all Truth seekers to 'Know thyself', and to do this it is necessary, first, to understand their own hearts and their own actions.

'The Locket' (C 2)

'The Locket', at Chokmah (Sephira 2), is the second poem in *Capriccio* and, from the opening lines on, it is full of dualities. "Sleeping and waking" (the two states of existence) the woman is "half blissful". She lives, but death seems, initially, to be "utterly within [her] power". The locket itself, with its two halves sometimes locked together,

sometimes open but still firmly linked, provides a symbolic image for all the dualities in the poem: life and death, male and female, entrapment and freedom, the shifting balance in the poem between the two lovers, and the shifting balance of power between the woman and death.

The woman who wears the locket could be Assia: the 'I' of the poem could be Ted. But the reference to the Canticles in the opening line of the poem suggests that, like the Canticle of Canticles (the Song of Songs¹⁰ in the Bible) this whole poem has a double meaning.

For centuries, the inclusion of the Song of Songs in the Jewish and Christian Biblical Canons has been debated because of its sensuous and erotic nature. Biblical scholars hold that it is an allegory which expresses God's love for His people, and/or the love of each individual for God or Christ. The bride of the song is variously interpreted as the community of Israel, the Shekinah, or a nun or female worshiper: and the bridegroom is God or Christ. In the Song of Songs eros (erotic love) is combined with agape (self-donating love), which, according to Pope Benedict XVI, are the two halves of true Love¹¹. Similarly, in Jewish Cabbala, this marriage of what Scholem calls the "begetting and receiving" potencies of God, constitutes the *heiros gamos*, the holy union of male and female powers, and the female element in God is given worldly existence in the Shekinah¹². For Cabbalists, therefore, the Song of Songs describes the marriage of Spirit with matter, which first occurs at Chokmah (Sephira 2) on the Sephirothic Tree.

In 'The Locket', Ted's mention of the spinster's dreams of a fiery cross has sexual and spiritual connotations which reflect the erotic yet worshipful charge of the poetic dialogue in the Song of Songs. And in both, the spiritual-material duality of Chokmah is clearly present. The love which is described in 'The Locket', however, is erotic love, potent with feelings of ownership and power, and with no sense of agape about it. And the gods in 'The Locket' are the gods of our fallen, demonized world, the gods of our human interpretation of spiritual power, and the gods of mythology.

So, the god associated with Chokmah in 'The Locket' is Pluto, the Roman God of the Underworld. He is 'the bridegroom', seeder of the land, and abductor of Persephone, with whom he fell helplessly in love after being pierced by an arrow of Cupid/Eros at Venus's behest. Pluto's number, for the Romans, was 2; his month was February, the second month of the year. He was Lord of the Realm of the Dead, and Charon, who is personified in 'The Locket' as Death, was gatekeeper to his realm.

The woman in 'The Locket' is sensual, provocative and alluring, but she is not the virginal bride of the Song of Songs, nor is she the maidenly Persephone. Death lies in the locket between her breasts, and is "nursed" – fed, like a witch's "familiar". And she keeps him, like a "curio pet" (a very strange creature), "trapped" and on a chain. Her feeling of power is manifest in the way she teases life: taunts it with this death which is in her power: and also teases death by biting the locket – placing its gold between her teeth, just as gold coins were put in the mouths of the dead to pay Charon to ferry them to Pluto's realm.

She is a human woman with seductive, “Demonic” powers (in THNSP the ‘D’ is capitalized and the word begins a line). But in Cabbala the demonic is everywhere present in our fallen world, and it is especially associated with the Shekinah.

The Zohar¹³, which is one of the earliest and most important Hebrew Cabbalistic texts, states that “There is a judgment that is severe and a judgment that is not severe. A judgment that is balanced and a judgment that is not balanced.” The Shekinah, which is the female aspect of God and the dwelling place of the human soul, embodies both alternately, but these alternating phases are responsible for her separation or exile from God. When the unbalanced power of severe judgment invades her, she becomes the demonic, ‘Lower Mother’, the vehicle of severe punishment, and the ‘Tree of Death’ which is demonically cut off from the ‘Tree of Life’.

According to Lurianic Cabbala, the Shekinah is freed from demonic forces “only on the Sabbath when she puts on her sephirothic garments”¹⁴. So, like the Moon Goddess, the Shekinah has a bright and a dark face and the Zohar describes this ambivalence (as Scholem notes) “with age-old lunar symbolism”: “At times the Shekinah tastes the other, bitter side, and then her face is dark”¹⁵.

The dark-faced Moon Goddess in Roman mythology, is Hecate who, like the Shekinah, is known as the ‘Terrible Mother’. She is the female aspect of Pluto, Invincible Queen of the Underworld with power over life and death, and the equal of Pluto in every respect. She uses her demonic charms to enchant and bewitch men and cause obsession and madness. And the demonic, seductive nature of the woman in ‘The Locket’, makes her a true daughter of Hecate.

Assia, throughout *Capriccio*, is seen as the demonic, dark face of the Shekinah, but this is only half her powers. We see nothing of the softer aspect of her nature.

Like Assia, the woman in Ted’s poem has escaped from Berlin, from persecution, and from death in a “long-cold oven / Locked with a swastika”. Assia’s escape from Nazi Germany was made in the early 1930s “on the eve of the second World War”¹⁶. Her father was a Russian Jew; her mother a German Protestant. The family would already have suffered some of the restrictions placed on Jews in Nazi Germany and although Assia was still a child she would certainly have been old enough to be disturbed by her parents’ worries, to share some of their fear, and to remember these things for the rest of her life.

In ‘The Locket’, Ted talks of the woman’s beauty as a “quarter-century posthumous”, which is the approximate length of time between Assia’s escape from Berlin and her first meeting with Ted. Assia’s death, too, was from gas from a long-cold oven. So, Ted’s poem seems to suggest that Assia, when she died, was fulfilling a nightmare vision she had always carried with her.

Whether or not this is true, it seems that having cheated Death once, the woman in

Ted's poem felt powerful enough to control him. This irrational belief is always doomed to failure: and in 'The Locket' it is constantly tested. The locket in which the woman believes she has "trapped" Death keeps splitting open, as if Death himself were teasing her, smiling at her, biding his time.

Ted, or the 'I' in the poem, remembers how he would close the locket, bringing the two halves together again (thus restoring the equilibrium) and the woman would smile. "I would close it. You would smile": the two halves of this line are carefully balanced, reflecting the interdependence of the man and woman. But he remembers, too, that he did not hear or see the true situation. He believed that their futures were linked and, like a bridegroom, he felt responsible, so he "juggled" with them, as if maintaining a delicate balance which might at any moment fall apart. But he did not see that his own relationship with this woman was peripheral to that between her and the gods who hold the real power over life and death.

In retrospect, it seems to him that the woman's beauty had, as in a folk-tale, been her bargaining chip with Death and had bought her "a quarter century" more of life. It was a gamble on her part, but Death had only to wait for the inevitable conclusion. And Death's whisper "Fait Accompli" – it is done and cannot be argued against – was always there, unheard by either of them. If this phrase is read aloud in this poem, the paronomasia of 'fait' and 'fate' suggests, also, the fated outcome of any folktale wager.

Folktales are fantasies. They seem to be about our world and they have a sort of logic of their own, follow an expected pattern, and often have a moral to impart. But, like the "crooked key" to the woman's locket, they are distorted and offer us a distorted picture full of irrational, magical events. Yet, in Cabbala, both the crooked key and the straight key are part of the fragmented whole of our fallen world. Like life and death, like eros and agape, and like the two halves of the locket itself, the crooked and the straight are inextricably linked together. So, to understand the whole we need to see both and to accept their intimate connection.

In 'The Locket', Ted reflected all the duality of Chokmah but, in particular, he acknowledged its dark, qliphothic powers which, as in all the Sephira, are married to the light.

Capriccio

'The Mythographers' (C 3)

The third poem of Capriccio, 'The Mythographers' occupies Sephira 3, Binah, seat of the All Mother who is also the Triple Goddess at her most powerful.

This poem is steeped in Hebrew Cabbalistic lore, especially that of the Zohar, where both Lilith and Nehama (also written Na'amah) appear as demonic seducers of men.

Lilith, in the Zohar, is also the dark demonic aspect of the Shekinah with which she is inextricably entwined. And just as the Shekinah is personified as the bride of Jehovah,

and also of Adam Kadmon (the perfected Adam that Cabbalists strive to become), so, Lilith the “whore” is the sexual partner of the fallen Adam (Adam Belial) and the wife of the dark angel of the ‘other side’, Sam’ael, Prince of Demons and Angel of Death¹⁷.

Sam’ael is twin brother of Metatron, the Archangel of Kether, ‘Sustainer of Mankind’. He descended from Heaven to become Lord of the Underworld and, just as the dark-faced, demonic Shekinah is separated from the Godhead because she embodies severe judgment, he, too, represents the ‘Severity of God’. His first wife is Lilith, Queen of the Night, who was once the first wife of Adam. His second consort is Nehama, whose name means ‘comfort’ or ‘pleasing’.

Both Lilith and Nehama fly from the dark, demonic ‘other side’ to seduce men. They “lead the sons of men astray, and dwell in the doorway of the house, and in cisterns and latrines” ¹⁸. Lilith, true to her moon-goddess nature, comes forth “month after month when the moon is renewed in the world”¹⁹. She comes to men in the night to seduce them in dreams and fantasies, and she bears demon children from their spilt semen. Nehama, unlike Lilith, takes human form to seduce men with her beauty and charms. But she, too, “makes sport with the sons of men, and becomes hot for them in dreams, in that desire which a man has, and she clings to him, and she takes the desire, and from it she conceives and brings forth other kinds into the world”.

Lilith and Nehama appear also as demonic powers in Neoplatonic Cabbala. There, they are rulers of the 7th Palace of Darkness and they govern the qlippothic shells of Yesod (9) and Malkuth (10), the two Sephiroth which are closest to the Underworld and in which both faces of the Goddess’s lunar powers are strongest. There is a connection, too, between Lilith and Frigga, because Lilith is known as the demon of Friday.

The parallels between all the various mythologies on which Ted drew in *Capriccio* reflect his belief that myths are “tribal dreams of the highest order of inspiration and truth, at their best”; stories which are “uncannily similar all over the world” and which are like “an archive of draft plans” (WP 152) for the sort of imagination which can help us to understand our world and ourselves. He expressed this belief many times, over many years, and in many ways: writing, at different times, that myths embody “universal and human truths” (WP 138); that they constitute a “pool of shared understandings” which represent a deposit of “spiritual and psychological wealth” (WP 310); and that they allow us to imaginatively enter “the realm of management between our ordinary minds and our deepest life” (WP 41).

In ‘The Mythographers’, Ted tells the stories of Lilith and Nehama and dramatizes the details given in the Zohar and in much earlier written and oral mythologies. In these old myths there are obvious truths about human nature, human wants and needs, human reactions to religious and social prohibitions related to masturbation, promiscuity, the ‘wasting’ of semen, and about human fantasies, fears and guilt. The stories of Lilith and Nehama, both of whom were associated with marriage, seduction, adultery, the birth and death of children, dreams and obsession, also had particular relevance to Ted’s own life and to his relationship with Assia. And the fact that Lilith and Nehama shared

Assia's Hebrew Judaic background, and that they represent the demonic face of the Shekinah, was important.

It is clear, however, from a later poem in *Capriccio*, ('Fanaticism' (C 7)) where Assia wears the quite different "mask" of Aphrodite, that Lilith and Nehama represented only the dark side of Assia's nature. Most importantly from a Cabbalistic point of view, by establishing these Demon Queens on the Sephirothic Tree at Binah (3), which is part of Supernal Triangle which 'Crowns' the Path of the Sword, Ted was marrying the energies of the All Mother (3) with those of the All Father at Chokmah (2) and joining both to the Source at Kether (1). Also, in establishing the Underworld deities at these Sephiroth, he was deliberately choosing to enter and probe the 'other side', for, as the Zohar puts it, "one who is saved from there is a loved one, a chosen one of the Blessed Holy One"²⁰: and only in this way can the Shekinah be reunited with God, and unity and harmony be restored.

God, in 'The Mythographers' is the creator of Adam and Eve, our primordial parents. But, in trying to understand the human condition and "testing it", so-to-speak, in various stories to see which held the most truth and offered people the most insight, the mythographers created Lilith and Nehama. Lilith's story is at least as old as the earliest Mesopotamian writings, where she appears as a willow-tree demon in the Gilgamesh Epic. In later myths she is Adam's first wife who, having been created from earth at the same time as him, regards herself as his equal and refuses to obey him and lie beneath him. Uttering the name of God, she flies off and leaves him. At God's intervention, and because she refuses to return to Adam, she is banished 'below' and becomes a demon who must deliver to God 100 of her offspring each day. So, she preys on unprotected children, and she visits men in their dreams, arouses them or copulates with them, and bears hundreds of children from their spilt sperm. Those who are not delivered to God as payment for leaving Adam, she brings up as spirits and demons. She is sometimes a screech-owl; and she is sometimes a hairy night-monster. She is known as 'Primordial Lilith', 'Ancient Lilith', 'Grandmother Lilith the Great', 'Great Whore', 'Tortuous Serpent', and 'Blind Dragon'. And she is immortal.

Lilith, in Ted's poem is all of these things. She is a willow-dwelling screech-owl. "Her abortions" are the spilt sperm of the men she visits in dreams. And, because of her, a couple may remain childless and 'free' for each other. She comes to men in the darkness, arouses them, and, as they stroke the hairs on her legs²¹, she detects the "Mayday signal" ('Mayday', which is the international call-sign for help, here refers both to the man's urgent need for sexual relief and to pagan May Day fertility rites) under rings which no longer represent the harmonious unity of marriage but are simply "finger rings" (the paronomasia with 'fingerings' reflects the man's actions). Laughing, Lilith seduces the man, and he, feverish in his fantasies, hallucinates her sexual voracity and her domination of him. She "rides him", and he is helpless to resist her: so, his guilt is assuaged. Human psychology, common sexual and emotional needs, social and religious pressures, and guilt, all make this myth compelling and have ensured its survival. Amongst some superstitious Jewish people, rituals and talismans are still used to banish Lilith from their bedrooms and to protect their new-born children.

The myths about Nehama are similarly compelling and offer similar comfort to guilt-ridden men and women caught up in the chaos caused by powerful sexual drives and deep emotional needs. Nehama first appears in the Bible (Genesis 4:22) as the descendent of Cain and sister of the first artificer in metal, Tubal Cain. Since Cain was banished from the earth by God and, therefore, belongs to the qliphothic 'other side', Nehama is a demon and she, like Lilith, is immortal. In the Zohar, it is said that after Cain's death, Adam kept separate from his wife, Eve, for 130 years, and that two female spirits, Lilith and Nehama came to copulate with him and bore demon children. But Adam was not Nehama's only conquest. Because of her beauty, "the sons of God went astray after her" and, "to this day, she exists and her abode is among the waves of the great sea. And she comes forth and makes sport with the sons of man"²².

Unlike Lilith, Nehama does not want the children she bears and "all of them go to Lilith the Ancient, and she rears them"²³. And unlike Lilith, Nehama takes human form in order to have adulterous relationships with men. She is the consort of Sam'ael and is "always included with him" but she is said to have comforted Adam and Noah, Abraham and Isaac. In the Bible (Proverbs 7) and in similar verses in the Zohar, she is described as a predatory adulteress, who bedecks herself "like a harlot" with jewellery and perfume to entice "the simple ones", young men who (like the man in Ted's poem) are "devoid of understanding". She woos them with kisses "in the black dark night", saying "Come let us take our fill of love until the morning: Let us solace ourselves with loves". So, although "her house is the way to hell", "with her fair speech" she causes men to yield.

Nehama, in Ted's poem is just like this but she is also subtly different. She has not just appeared in human form, she has taken over "some woman's divorced and desperate body", which become a living "corpse", a "shadow", a "tailor's dummy". The man is a "simpleton". Like Adam, he has "quit" his wife. But the reason Ted gives for his having done this makes little sense unless the word 'television' is broken down to its root meaning and the position of this poem at Binah, the seat of the Great Goddess on the Sephirothic Tree, is taken into account. If this is done, 'tele' (Greek for 'at a distance') vision suggests that the man had visionary powers which allowed him to see through the veil of illusion which hides the Truth in our world and which is created and guarded by Binah. Beyond the veil of Binah is wisdom, understanding and Truth. This is what Nehama seems to offer this man, and she uses all her charms to "numb him" to any rational or moral "pangs" which might distract him, and to convince him that "he's found it".

Assia Wevill was twice divorced and she was still married to David Wevill when the relationship between her and Ted began. Ted, too, was still married to Sylvia, although they would soon separate. So, the relationship between Assia and Ted was adulterous. Assia, according to most reports, was an intelligent and attractive woman who wore stylish clothes and expensive perfumes. She had, it seems, boasted to friends that she would seduce Ted. She worried about losing her looks and, until Shura was born, she had never wanted children. She was also a displaced person who had been born in a

country which was, shortly afterwards, at war with Britain, so, in the common English expression of the times she came from the “other side”, although the accent she had acquired since leaving Germany disguised this. Her father was Jewish, and Ted’s imagery in this poem draws on the religious practice of some Jewish women who shave their heads and wear wigs, but there is no evidence that Assia ever adopted this practice.

The parallels between the woman in this poem and Assia Wevill are remarkable. But this is partly because the myth of Nehama is based on a common human scenario. It is also because Ted chose to pick out only those things about Assia which fitted his Cabbalistic purpose and established the deities of the Underworld as his ‘Crown’ for this Path of the Sword.

In any case, whether the woman in this poem is taken to be Assia or not, this woman is possessed by Nehama. It is Nehama who does not want to be pregnant and who sees and fears the skull beneath the skin of the suckling baby. It is Nehama (who is immortal) who smells death and corruption in the woman whose body she occupies, and is horrified by it. And it is Nehama who sacrifices the “baby-skull” and goes through “Death’s oven-door” with the child and the woman to give that child to Grandmother Lilith.

Nehama, like the wig on the tailor’s dummy, is a simulacrum of a real, living thing; a decorative but false temporary adornment: but the woman and the man are human, and so must die. In the structure of Ted’s poem, the break which separates “Let it watch her” from “In the Irish mirror”, but which is not reinforced by punctuation, effectively allows both the mortals in this poem (the possessed woman and the wretched bridegroom who “understands nothing”) to be reflected in the “Irish mirror”. Magical mirrors that reveal the truth or the future are common in Irish mythology, and in this one the image of both mortals is that of a skull grinning down.

The merging of myth and fact in this poem is chilling and awesome, but that Ted intended the woman in the poem to be not just Assia but also a manifestation of the Great Goddess in human form, is reinforced by two other images.

The first, like the suggestion that the man quit his wife because of the truth-revealing power of television, is awkward and out of place if taken at face value. Nehama’s “fingers/ Her knees, her armpits” are described as “flying/ Buttresses of Dover Cliffs”. We may imagine limbs as white as the Dover chalk, but there would have been many better and more appropriate ways of describing this, and Ted was certainly capable of finding one. Chalky whiteness and the link with the sea must have been important to him here, and both, as he well knew are associated with Leucothea, the White Goddess. She, like Nehama, once had human form. She, too, killed herself and her child. She, too, was given immortality as a goddess of the sea. And she, too, buttressed (in a manner of speaking) and supported men in distress: most notably, when she gave Odysseus her veil to use as protection when Poseidon’s storms threatened to drown him. The full story of Leucothea is told by Robert Graves in *Greek Myths*²⁴. But he

wrote of her, too, in *The White Goddess*, and also of another Goddess, Leucippe (White Mare), who appears later in the *Capriccio* sequence as the “familiar” of the woman in the poems²⁵. Virgin

The second image which links the woman/Nehama to the Great Goddess is the final image of the poem, in which “Her last / backward glance / seals a star” between the bridegroom’s eyes. Certainly, events may well have marked the man’s forehead with a permanent star-like frown. But for Cabbalists a seal has magical power²⁶. And the star is the most important symbol of the Goddess, present on images of her from the earliest Mesopotamian clay tablets to the most recent religious paintings and icons²⁷. Between the eyes, too, is a point of mystical significance: it is the place of the Third Eye, the Ajan chakra, the locus of energies associated with intuitive insight, spirit-to-spirit communication, and with our deepest spiritual powers. So, in effect, the Goddess marked this man as one of her chosen: one called to serve her and one with whom she might communicate directly. In Ted’s mythological understanding, even such a glancing choice as this would have been equivalent to a shamanic call.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Publication details on the endpage of *Capriccio: Poems by Ted Hughes, Engravings by Leonard Baskin*, The Gehenna Press, 1990.)
2. Neil Spencer, *True as the Stars Above*, Gollacz, London, 2000. pp.51-2.
3. In Cabbala, 3 is the number of the Goddess at Binah, and of the Path of the High Priestess in Tarot. It is a mystical number which combines the divine power of 1 with the force of 2 and brings them into dynamic equilibrium. $6 = 3 \times 2$: the Goddess’s powers doubled. It is common Cabbalistic practice to refer to numbers by digits rather than by words.
4. Ann Skea, diary notes of a conversation with Ted Hughes in 1995. These notebooks are now in the British Library archives.
5. Carol Bere noted it in a scholarly paper in 1992, but her paper did not appear in print until 2004. Bere, C. ‘Complicated with Old Ghosts’, in Moulin (Ed.) *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, Routledge, London, 2004. pp. 29-37.
6. Helene, C. *The Sacred Science of Numbers*, DeVorss, CA, 1997. p. 93. This book will be referred to in the text as SSN.
7. Crowley discusses the Cabbalist’s Sword in detail in Ch. VIII, ‘The Sword’, of his *Magick*, Book IV.
8. Scholem, G. *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1969. pp. 128-9.

9. Carol Bere noted that the tone of the narrative voice in *Capriccio* is less “intimate” and “conversational” than in *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers* and that “the speaker tends to be more of a passive respondent”. ‘Complicated with Old Ghosts’, op.cit. p. 37.

10. ‘Canticles’ appears in the original 1990, Gehenna Press publication. Ted changed this to ‘Song of Songs’ in *Ted Hughes: New Selected Poems 1951-1994*.

11. Pope Benedict XVI’s 2006 Encyclical, ‘God is Love’. Catholic Encyclopedia (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03302a.htm>).

12. Scholem’s discussion of this aspect of Cabbala in *On the Kabbala and its Symbolism*, op. cit. pp. 104-9, is invaluable background reading for understanding Ted’s linking of Assia with demonic powers in *Capriccio*.

13. The Zohar or Book of Splendour is a collection of texts which are mostly commentaries on the Jewish Torah and on the unseen mysteries therein. It is generally believed to have been transcribed from earlier documents by the Spanish Jew, Moses de Leon in the 13th century.

14. Scholem, *On the Kabbala and its Symbolism*, op. cit. p. 59.

15. *ibid.* p.107.

16. Feinstein, E. *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 2001, p. 120.

17. Raphael Patai, *Sitrei Torah* 1:147b-8, at (<https://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Topic/Lilith/Index.html>).

“The male is called Sam’ael
his female is always included within him.
Just as it is on the side of holiness,
so it is on the other side.”

18. *Ibid.* Zohar 3:76b-77a

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.* 1:147b-148b.

21. It is said that King Solomon became convinced that the seductive and exotic Queen of Sheba was actually Lilith, because of the hair on her legs.

22. Zohar, op. cit. 3:76b-77a.

23. Ibid.

24. Graves, R. Greek Myths, Cassell, London, 1955.

25. 'Familiar' (C 18).

26. Seals have always conveyed power. Seals are still used to authorize documents, and to represent the authority of a person or even, in business, an incorporated body. Similarly, magical seals are believed to convey the power of whichever god's symbol (or 'signature') is on them.

27. In Christian iconography, both star and moon are commonly associated with the Virgin Mary: the Goddess's eight pointed star often appears on her robes; the crescent moon beneath her feet.

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[Capriccio: The Path of the Sword.](#)

Poetry and Magic 1 and 2 should be read first unless the reader already has a good understanding of the serious spiritual practice of Cabbala, and is familiar with the Cabbalistic Tree and the Tarot cards associated with its Paths.

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[Title page](#)

[Introduction and 'Capriccios' \(C 1\)](#)

Capriccio was first published as a beautifully illustrated, leather bound, limited edition of fifty books in the "unsettled Spring of 1990"¹. Ted was in his sixtieth year, which, astrologically, marks the return of the planet Saturn to the position which it originally occupied in his birth-chart. As Ted would have known, this signifies "a point of reckoning, a crucial stage in our personal evolution... a time when boundaries are broken and outworn structures abandoned.". At sixty, this so-called 'Saturn Return' "marks our passage to being an elder"².

Cabbalistically, too, 60 (6 x 10) shows the Goddess's powers as doubled and directed through Tiphereth (6 – Love) at the heart of the Tree, in such a way that Malkuth (10 – The World) is joined to the Source³. This particular Path, on the Pillar of Equilibrium, is the Path of the Arrow which a Cabbalist will take at the completion of the Great Work.

Astrologically and Cabbalistically, therefore, it was appropriate that Ted should have chosen his sixtieth year to begin to deal with the events in his life which, as he told me

when he first spoke about these poems, he “should have dealt with earlier, but couldn’t”⁴.

In 1995, eight poems from *Capriccio* and eight poems from *Birthday Letters* were included in a selection of ‘Uncollected’ poems in *Ted Hughes: New Selected Poems 1951-1994*. *Birthday Letters* and a small limited edition of poems, called *Howls & Whispers*, were not published until 1998, eight years after *Capriccio* first appeared. All three sequences, *Capriccio*, *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*, were not published together until five years after Ted’s death, when they appeared in *Ted Hughes: Collected Poems* in 2003. Even then, the *Capriccio* poems were separated from the other two sequences by more than 200 pages. So, apart from that first linking in 1995 of these poems about Assia Wevill with poems about Sylvia Plath, there was little but the biographical nature of the poems to suggest that all three sequences were part of one complete cycle, or that the *Capriccio* poems might have been a necessary part of Ted’s Cabbalistic journey.

Other things also hid this link from the casual observer⁵. Ted chose to publish both *Capriccio* and *Howls & Whispers* as finely bound, expensive, strictly limited editions, which included original woodcuts and etchings by his friend Leonard Baskin and were published by Baskin’s Gehenna Press. A gap of eight years separated the appearance of these two books. Few people, therefore, were in a position to notice that the first poem of *Capriccio* (entitled ‘Capriccios’) was, with only the smallest of changes, identical with the last poem of *Howls & Whispers* (‘Superstitions’).

Carol Bere did note this and she wrote that *Capriccio*, *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers* could “be viewed as fragments of one long sequence or, more accurately, as separate, although interrelated sequences”. She noted the circular pattern of the sequences, too, and saw this as suggesting “the impossibility of fulfilment of transforming or completed myth”.

In Cabbala, however, quite the opposite is true. The completed circle marks the fulfilment of the Cabbalist’s goal and the attainment of wholeness, harmony and rebirth. So, the repetition of a poem at the start of *Capriccio* and at the end of *Howls & Whispers* suggests that these two books were part of a single Cabbalistic journey which, in this case, also included *Birthday Letters*. The total number of poems in the three sequences (20 in *Capriccio*, 88 in *Birthday Letters*, and 11 in *Howls & Whispers*) is 119, which, in Cabbalistic numerology, reduces to 11, a Master Number which is “the great general number of magic or energy tending to change.”⁶ The energies of 11 hold the power of “attainment, supremacy and mastership” and bind all opposites together to bring everything to equilibrium. And this is exactly what Ted was attempting to do as he used his will, his imagination and all his poetic, shamanic and Cabbalistic skills to re-member (in the literal and the common meaning of this word) his relationship with Assia and Sylvia.

The seemingly small differences between the first poem in *Capriccio* and the final poem of *Howls & Whispers* are significant, too, when the poems are seen as part of the same

healing journey. “You will be laughed at for your superstitions” Ted warns in ‘Capriccios’ (C 1), at the start of the journey. But in ‘Superstitions’ (H&W 11), when his journey has been successfully completed, he is confident enough to scorn the opinion of others: “Let them laugh”.

Ted certainly paid attention to superstitions. In a book review in 1964, he wrote: “The major superstitions are impressive. They are so old, so unkillable and so few. If they are pure nonsense, why aren’t there more of them? But they all keep reviving with the perverse air of intuitions, never losing their central idea, no matter how richly they proliferate in details.”(WP 51). The change of title between the two poems encapsulates Ted’s awareness that those who deal with supernatural powers (as a Cabbalist or shaman or even a priest must do) must pay attention to seemingly capricious nature which superstition attributes to them, and his final unconcern for those who regard superstitions as having no real foundation.

The only other difference between the two poems is similarly interesting. Speaking of Frigga, the great Norse Goddess whose presence he invokes in the opening lines of both poems by a threefold repetition of her name-day Friday (Freya’s Day, or Frigga’s Day), he issues the command in ‘Capriccios’ to “imagine the bride’s mirror/ In the form of a cauldron”. In the tradition of ritual magic, this command is made to all participants, including the speaker. “Call it”, he instructs (again speaking to himself and us) “a cauldron / Of the soul’s rebirth”. Frigga is the Triple Goddess: Bride, Mother and Layer-Out. Her element is the sea (the cauldron of all the elements) the waters of which are associated with the human subconscious, the soul, and with life and death. In this first poem of Ted’s journey, he invokes the Goddess as the bride into whose cauldron/mirror he is about to peer as he searches her waters, like his own creature, Wodwo, for roots, memories and understanding. In ‘Superstitions’, at the end of his journey, there is no such command, and Frigga’s cauldron has become “The cauldron of Valhalla / where warriors [and perhaps poets who have completed the heroic journey] are reborn”.

Everything I wrote about ‘Superstitions’ when I dealt with it in Poetry and Magic 2: Howls & Whispers applies equally to ‘Capriccios’. At the start and at the completion of his journey, Ted invokes the Great Goddess in the person of Frigga, the Goddess of the Norse mythology which he believed to be “much deeper in us, and truer to us, than the Greek-Roman pantheons...” (WP 41). He summons her into our world “Today” (which is the immediate and continuous present), and he ensures her presence by repeating her name-day and the numinous number 13. In Cabbala, 13 is a supremely powerful number. It combines the energies of 1, 2 and 3 which, as the Supernal Triangle at the Crown of the Tree, represent the ever-flowing forces of the Source present in our world (SSN 105). It is the number of the Sacrificed King (the Hanged Man in the Tarot pack), and of the Sacred Feminine which is represented by the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet – Mem (water). The presence of Mem, written and heard in the words ‘memory’ and ‘remember’, is coincidental, but the poetic and magical power of its presence would not have been lost on Ted as he made his journey through Capriccio, Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers.

The title of the first poem of Ted's journey is 'Capriccios' which is the singular form of the word which Ted chose as the title for the whole sequence. Dictionary definitions of this word refer to an artistic work in free form, a musical improvisation, a work full of sudden changes, a freak, a fantasy. None of these definitions is appropriate, either for Ted's opening poem or for the whole sequence, both of which are carefully structured, and serious in mood and theme. 'Capriccio', however, comes from seventeenth century Italian and is made up of 'capo' (meaning 'head') and 'riccio', (meaning 'hedgehog'). Hence, 'capo-riccio' means hedgehog-headed and describes a head with the hair standing on end. The images conjured up by this meaning are ones of surprise, shock, horror and terror. These are the images depicted, and elicited, by Goya's etchings *Los Caprichos* (The Caprices) (1793-1778). And similar nightmares and horrors pervade Ted's *Capriccio* poems and appear, too, in Baskin's accompanying illustrations.

Goya described *Los Caprichos* as "a criticism of human errors and vices" and his serious purpose was to make rational and satirical comment on the society in which he was living. In particular, the etching on which he included the comment, "The sleep of reason engenders monsters", reflects Ted's own purpose in *Capriccio*, although Ted's poems are not in any way satirical. The cats, owls, and bats which become creatures of nightmare and witchcraft as they loom from the darkness around the sleeping figure in Goya's etching are matched by the demons, monsters and skulls in Ted's poems and in Baskin's accompanying engravings. As are the elements of unexpected horror and death which pervade many of Goya's other *Los Caprichos* pictures and convey the monstrous, terrifying, topsy-turvy nature of a world where reason has been upset by human passion and folly.

It is easy to imagine that Ted, remembering his relationship with Assia, remembering their meeting and the turmoil of events which followed, remembering Sylvia's death, his own and Assia's chaotic emotions, and Assia and Shura's deaths, might interpret this as the result of the sleep of reason and, in particular, of his own irrational passions and folly. In the only Birthday Letters poem which refers to Assia, he described how "the dreamer in her" fell in love with "the dreamer" in him: and how "the dreamer" in him fell in love with her ('Dreamers'. BL 157-8). In 'The Pit and the Stones' in *Capriccio*, Ted writes of "his own weakness". And in 'Capriccios', he seems to suggest that the man and woman in the poem, as recipients of Frigga's "two-faced gift", were the pawns of capricious gods. In theory, one can always decline to accept a gift. But at least, if one fears offending the gods in this way, one must heed the traditional superstitious belief that the gods always require payment for their gifts. Whether or not Ted and Assia were the pawns of capricious gods, the fact is that he and Assia did fall in love and that everything in *Capriccio* portrays that love as the sleep of reason and their mutual immersion in a sometimes nightmarish dream.

Yet, the Cabbalistic structure of the *Capriccio* sequence suggests that these poems had a purpose beyond that of simply depicting the turmoil caused by irrational passions.

If Capriccio was the first stage of Ted's Cabbalistic journey, then there was a compelling and highly rational magical purpose to his recollection (and re-collection) of all the events, passions, turbulence and terrors of his years with Assia. It is related to a Pathway on the Cabbalistic Tree which is known as the Path of the Sword and it maps a journey which needs to be taken before the Path of Wisdom (which Ted followed in Birthday Letters) and The Path of the Snake (which Ted undertook in Howls & Whispers) are attempted.

The Path of the Sword follows the Lightning Flash down the Sephirothic Tree, from Sephira to Sephira, starting at Kether (1) and ending at Malkuth (10). This journey is made in the World of Assiah, and it is made by a so-called 'Crowned Magician' whose crown represents "the attainment of his Work"⁷, and also, most importantly, the 'Crown' of Supernal energies made by Sephiroth 1, 2 and 3 at the top of the Sephirothic Tree.

The Cabbalist's Sword is "Reason...the analytical faculty", which is used to cut through "the complexity and chaos caused in the heart". It must be thrust into the Cabbalist's own heart to free "the perceptions from the Web of emotion". Only in this way can the simple truth be separated from the distorting emotions which may obscure the clear perception of it.

Before any important Cabbalistic journey is undertaken, it is advisable, first, to take The Path of the Sword in order to strike terror into and dominate any 'demons' (or disrupting, distorting thoughts and emotions) which might break the continuous progress (or circle) of that journey. In the words of the respected Jewish scholar of Cabbala, Gershom Scholem, the "ritual elimination of negative factors that disturb the right order" is of utmost importance and, particularly in Lurianic Cabbala, the purpose of many rituals is to control the qliphothic demonic and satanic powers of "the other side", which are "at present mixed with all things and destroy them from within"⁸.

Regardless of any Cabbalistic purpose, it is understandable that Ted should have chosen to deal separately with the emotional years of his relationship with Assia before immersing himself in memories of his life with Sylvia. In this way, he could allow each woman her own poetic sequence and her own story. Had he not done this, the revival of strong emotions as he wrote the poems and recalled, re-created and re-lived the emotional turmoil of the period when Assia first entered his and Sylvia's lives, might well have prevented him from completing the sequence. At the very least, his judgment would have been clouded and the sort of balanced view of all that had happened which he sought to achieve might well have been impossible. So, in Capriccio, Ted attempted to bring all possible emotional 'demons' under control before he embarked on what, for him, was clearly the most difficult and dangerous task of remembering Sylvia.

The evidence that Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers record Ted's Cabbalistic journey towards balance, harmony and wholeness is very strong, as I have shown in my analysis of these sequences. So, too, is the possibility that Capriccio represents his preparatory journey along the Path of the Sword. And it is of special interest in this respect that in his New Selected Poems Ted changed the word 'canticles' in 'The

Locket' (C 2) to 'Song of Songs', thereby specifically referring to a canticle which has very special meaning for Cabbalists and, in particular, for those who are of Jewish descent, as Assia was.

The poems in *Capriccio* are dark and difficult poems, peopled by gods and goddesses from many mythologies, and Ted deliberately chose to deal with their darkest most demonic powers. But the tone of the poems is noticeably firmer, sharper and more consistently objective than it is in *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*⁹. Ted does not describe Assia: only her voice and her clothes. Nor does he conjure or evoke her in the way he constantly conjures Sylvia in *Birthday Letters*, picturing her brilliant-eyed at the birth of her child; bent at her desk writing; sitting amongst the daffodils. As in *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*, the woman in *Capriccio* is not named but is 'you', 'she' or 'her', a device which hides individual identity and, as in Ted's very early poem 'Song' (THCP 24) allows him to conflate the woman with the Muse/Goddess whose energies (as Ted believed) all women embody. Occasionally, 'you' seems to be used by the narrator as a form of self-address and/or to include the reader or hearer of the poem, which further hinders specific identification of the addressee. At times, too, the narrator distances himself even further from the events, and 'you' and 'I' become 'she' and 'he'.

These distancing measures also allow *Capriccio* to be less of a personal, 'confessional', indulgence and more like a myth in which readers may recognize some elements as reflections of their own experiences. So, *Capriccio*, like *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*, may become "your story, my story" and include us in Ted's poetic, Cabbalistic and shamanic ritual.Sword

All of these devices may be seen as Ted's deliberate and rational way of cutting through the emotional turmoil which the revival of personal memories must bring. But the creation and wielding of the Cabbalistic Sword also requires the utmost balance and care, as the metaphorical description of the Sword suggests. Its double-edged blade must be made of steel, the metal of Mars: so, it is used with strength and ruthlessness. To balance this, the hilt must be of Copper, the metal of Venus; and the guard shaped like her two crescent moons, waxing and waning: so Love must be the motive and the guide of its use. Figuratively placed point-down on the Sephirothic Tree, the pommel of the Sword is in Da'ath (the hidden Sephira, Knowledge); the guard extends horizontally from Chesed (4) to Geburah (5) to combine Mercy and Severity; and the point rests in Malkuth (10). The 'Crown' of the Supernal Triangle must remain above the Cabbalist's head to guide each individual action. If this balance of strength, love and guidance is not present, then the Cabbalist, as he plunges the Sword into his own heart, will destroy himself.

All of this, I must repeat, is imaginative metaphor for the task which must be undertaken by all who seek Truth. It complies with the fundamental spiritual command to all Truth seekers to 'Know thyself', and to do this it is necessary, first, to understand their own hearts and their own actions.

'The Locket' (C 2)

'The Locket', at Chokmah (Sephira 2), is the second poem in Capriccio and, from the opening lines on, it is full of dualities. "Sleeping and waking" (the two states of existence) the woman is "half blissful". She lives, but death seems, initially, to be "utterly within [her] power". The locket itself, with its two halves sometimes locked together, sometimes open but still firmly linked, provides a symbolic image for all the dualities in the poem: life and death, male and female, entrapment and freedom, the shifting balance in the poem between the two lovers, and the shifting balance of power between the woman and death.

The woman who wears the locket could be Assia: the 'I' of the poem could be Ted. But the reference to the Canticles in the opening line of the poem suggests that, like the Canticle of Canticles (the Song of Songs¹⁰ in the Bible) this whole poem has a double meaning.

For centuries, the inclusion of the Song of Songs in the Jewish and Christian Biblical Canons has been debated because of its sensuous and erotic nature. Biblical scholars hold that it is an allegory which expresses God's love for His people, and/or the love of each individual for God or Christ. The bride of the song is variously interpreted as the community of Israel, the Shekinah, or a nun or female worshiper: and the bridegroom is God or Christ. In the Song of Songs eros (erotic love) is combined with agape (self-donating love), which, according to Pope Benedict XVI, are the two halves of true Love¹¹. Similarly, in Jewish Cabbala, this marriage of what Scholem calls the "begetting and receiving" potencies of God, constitutes the heiros gamos, the holy union of male and female powers, and the female element in God is given worldly existence in the Shekinah¹². For Cabbalists, therefore, the Song of Songs describes the marriage of Spirit with matter, which first occurs at Chokmah (Sephira 2) on the Sephirothic Tree.

In 'The Locket', Ted's mention of the spinster's dreams of a fiery cross has sexual and spiritual connotations which reflect the erotic yet worshipful charge of the poetic dialogue in the Song of Songs. And in both, the spiritual-material duality of Chokmah is clearly present. The love which is described in 'The Locket', however, is erotic love, potent with feelings of ownership and power, and with no sense of agape about it. And the gods in 'The Locket' are the gods of our fallen, demonized world, the gods of our human interpretation of spiritual power, and the gods of mythology.

So, the god associated with Chokmah in 'The Locket' is Pluto, the Roman God of the Underworld. He is 'the bridegroom', seeder of the land, and abductor of Persephone, with whom he fell helplessly in love after being pierced by an arrow of Cupid/Eros at Venus's behest. Pluto's number, for the Romans, was 2; his month was February, the second month of the year. He was Lord of the Realm of the Dead, and Charon, who is personified in 'The Locket' as Death, was gatekeeper to his realm.

The woman in 'The Locket' is sensual, provocative and alluring, but she is not the virginal bride of the Song of Songs, nor is she the maidenly Persephone. Death lies in

the locket between her breasts, and is “nursed” – fed, like a witch’s “familiar”. And she keeps him, like a “curio pet” (a very strange creature), “trapped” and on a chain. Her feeling of power is manifest in the way she teases life: taunts it with this death which is in her power: and also teases death by biting the locket – placing its gold between her teeth, just as gold coins were put in the mouths of the dead to pay Charon to ferry them to Pluto’s realm.

She is a human woman with seductive, “Demonic” powers (in THNSP the ‘D’ is capitalized and the word begins a line). But in Cabbala the demonic is everywhere present in our fallen world, and it is especially associated with the Shekinah.

The Zohar¹³, which is one of the earliest and most important Hebrew Cabbalistic texts, states that “There is a judgment that is severe and a judgment that is not severe. A judgment that is balanced and a judgment that is not balanced.” The Shekinah, which is the female aspect of God and the dwelling place of the human soul, embodies both alternately, but these alternating phases are responsible for her separation or exile from God. When the unbalanced power of severe judgment invades her, she becomes the demonic, ‘Lower Mother’, the vehicle of severe punishment, and the ‘Tree of Death’ which is demonically cut off from the ‘Tree of Life’.

According to Lurianic Cabbala, the Shekinah is freed from demonic forces “only on the Sabbath when she puts on her sephirothic garments”¹⁴. So, like the Moon Goddess, the Shekinah has a bright and a dark face and the Zohar describes this ambivalence (as Scholem notes) “with age-old lunar symbolism”: “At times the Shekinah tastes the other, bitter side, and then her face is dark”¹⁵.

The dark-faced Moon Goddess in Roman mythology, is Hecate who, like the Shekinah, is known as the ‘Terrible Mother’. She is the female aspect of Pluto, Invincible Queen of the Underworld with power over life and death, and the equal of Pluto in every respect. She uses her demonic charms to enchant and bewitch men and cause obsession and madness. And the demonic, seductive nature of the woman in ‘The Locket’, makes her a true daughter of Hecate.

Assia, throughout *Capriccio*, is seen as the demonic, dark face of the Shekinah, but this is only half her powers. We see nothing of the softer aspect of her nature.

Like Assia, the woman in Ted’s poem has escaped from Berlin, from persecution, and from death in a “long-cold oven / Locked with a swastika”. Assia’s escape from Nazi Germany was made in the early 1930s “on the eve of the second World War”¹⁶. Her father was a Russian Jew; her mother a German Protestant. The family would already have suffered some of the restrictions placed on Jews in Nazi Germany and although Assia was still a child she would certainly have been old enough to be disturbed by her parents’ worries, to share some of their fear, and to remember these things for the rest of her life.

In ‘The Locket’, Ted talks of the woman’s beauty as a “quarter-century posthumous”,

which is the approximate length of time between Assia's escape from Berlin and her first meeting with Ted. Assia's death, too, was from gas from a long-cold oven. So, Ted's poem seems to suggest that Assia, when she died, was fulfilling a nightmare vision she had always carried with her.

Whether or not this is true, it seems that having cheated Death once, the woman in Ted's poem felt powerful enough to control him. This irrational belief is always doomed to failure: and in 'The Locket' it is constantly tested. The locket in which the woman believes she has "trapped" Death keeps splitting open, as if Death himself were teasing her, smiling at her, biding his time.

Ted, or the 'I' in the poem, remembers how he would close the locket, bringing the two halves together again (thus restoring the equilibrium) and the woman would smile. "I would close it. You would smile": the two halves of this line are carefully balanced, reflecting the interdependence of the man and woman. But he remembers, too, that he did not hear or see the true situation. He believed that their futures were linked and, like a bridegroom, he felt responsible, so he "juggled" with them, as if maintaining a delicate balance which might at any moment fall apart. But he did not see that his own relationship with this woman was peripheral to that between her and the gods who hold the real power over life and death.

In retrospect, it seems to him that the woman's beauty had, as in a folk-tale, been her bargaining chip with Death and had bought her "a quarter century" more of life. It was a gamble on her part, but Death had only to wait for the inevitable conclusion. And Death's whisper "Fait Accompli" – it is done and cannot be argued against – was always there, unheard by either of them. If this phrase is read aloud in this poem, the paronomasia of 'fait' and 'fate' suggests, also, the fated outcome of any folktale wager.

Folktales are fantasies. They seem to be about our world and they have a sort of logic of their own, follow an expected pattern, and often have a moral to impart. But, like the "crooked key" to the woman's locket, they are distorted and offer us a distorted picture full of irrational, magical events. Yet, in Cabbala, both the crooked key and the straight key are part of the fragmented whole of our fallen world. Like life and death, like eros and agape, and like the two halves of the locket itself, the crooked and the straight are inextricably linked together. So, to understand the whole we need to see both and to accept their intimate connection.

In 'The Locket', Ted reflected all the duality of Chokmah but, in particular, he acknowledged its dark, qliphothic powers which, as in all the Sephira, are married to the light.

Capriccio

'The Mythographers' (C 3)

The third poem of Capriccio, 'The Mythographers' occupies Sephira 3, Binah, seat of the All Mother who is also the Triple Goddess at her most powerful.

This poem is steeped in Hebrew Cabbalistic lore, especially that of the Zohar, where both Lilith and Nehama (also written Na'amah) appear as demonic seducers of men.

Lilith, in the Zohar, is also the dark demonic aspect of the Shekinah with which she is inextricably entwined. And just as the Shekinah is personified as the bride of Jehovah, and also of Adam Kadmon (the perfected Adam that Cabbalists strive to become), so, Lilith the "whore" is the sexual partner of the fallen Adam (Adam Belial) and the wife of the dark angel of the 'other side', Sam'ael, Prince of Demons and Angel of Death¹⁷.

Sam'ael is twin brother of Metatron, the Archangel of Kether, 'Sustainer of Mankind'. He descended from Heaven to become Lord of the Underworld and, just as the dark-faced, demonic Shekinah is separated from the Godhead because she embodies severe judgment, he, too, represents the 'Severity of God'. His first wife is Lilith, Queen of the Night, who was once the first wife of Adam. His second consort is Nehama, whose name means 'comfort' or 'pleasing'.

Both Lilith and Nehama fly from the dark, demonic 'other side' to seduce men. They "lead the sons of men astray, and dwell in the doorway of the house, and in cisterns and latrines" ¹⁸. Lilith, true to her moon-goddess nature, comes forth "month after month when the moon is renewed in the world"¹⁹. She comes to men in the night to seduce them in dreams and fantasies, and she bears demon children from their spilt semen. Nehama, unlike Lilith, takes human form to seduce men with her beauty and charms. But she, too, "makes sport with the sons of men, and becomes hot for them in dreams, in that desire which a man has, and she clings to him, and she takes the desire, and from it she conceives and brings forth other kinds into the world".

Lilith and Nehama appear also as demonic powers in Neoplatonic Cabbala. There, they are rulers of the 7th Palace of Darkness and they govern the qliphothic shells of Yesod (9) and Malkuth (10), the two Sephiroth which are closest to the Underworld and in which both faces of the Goddess's lunar powers are strongest. There is a connection, too, between Lilith and Frigga, because Lilith is known as the demon of Friday.

The parallels between all the various mythologies on which Ted drew in *Capriccio* reflect his belief that myths are "tribal dreams of the highest order of inspiration and truth, at their best"; stories which are "uncannily similar all over the world" and which are like "an archive of draft plans" (WP 152) for the sort of imagination which can help us to understand our world and ourselves. He expressed this belief many times, over many years, and in many ways: writing, at different times, that myths embody "universal and human truths" (WP 138); that they constitute a "pool of shared understandings" which represent a deposit of "spiritual and psychological wealth" (WP 310); and that they allow us to imaginatively enter "the realm of management between our ordinary minds and our deepest life" (WP 41).

In 'The Mythographers', Ted tells the stories of Lilith and Nehama and dramatizes the details given in the Zohar and in much earlier written and oral mythologies. In these old

myths there are obvious truths about human nature, human wants and needs, human reactions to religious and social prohibitions related to masturbation, promiscuity, the 'wasting' of semen, and about human fantasies, fears and guilt. The stories of Lilith and Nehama, both of whom were associated with marriage, seduction, adultery, the birth and death of children, dreams and obsession, also had particular relevance to Ted's own life and to his relationship with Assia. And the fact that Lilith and Nehama shared Assia's Hebrew Judaic background, and that they represent the demonic face of the Shekinah, was important.

It is clear, however, from a later poem in *Capriccio*, ('Fanaticism' (C 7)) where Assia wears the quite different "mask" of Aphrodite, that Lilith and Nehama represented only the dark side of Assia's nature. Most importantly from a Cabbalistic point of view, by establishing these Demon Queens on the Sephirothic Tree at Binah (3), which is part of Supernal Triangle which 'Crowns' the Path of the Sword, Ted was marrying the energies of the All Mother (3) with those of the All Father at Chokmah (2) and joining both to the Source at Kether (1). Also, in establishing the Underworld deities at these Sephiroth, he was deliberately choosing to enter and probe the 'other side', for, as the Zohar puts it, "one who is saved from there is a loved one, a chosen one of the Blessed Holy One"²⁰: and only in this way can the Shekinah be reunited with God, and unity and harmony be restored.

God, in 'The Mythographers' is the creator of Adam and Eve, our primordial parents. But, in trying to understand the human condition and "testing it", so-to-speak, in various stories to see which held the most truth and offered people the most insight, the mythographers created Lilith and Nehama. Lilith's story is at least as old as the earliest Mesopotamian writings, where she appears as a willow-tree demon in the Gilgamesh Epic. In later myths she is Adam's first wife who, having been created from earth at the same time as him, regards herself as his equal and refuses to obey him and lie beneath him. Uttering the name of God, she flies off and leaves him. At God's intervention, and because she refuses to return to Adam, she is banished 'below' and becomes a demon who must deliver to God 100 of her offspring each day. So, she preys on unprotected children, and she visits men in their dreams, arouses them or copulates with them, and bears hundreds of children from their spilt sperm. Those who are not delivered to God as payment for leaving Adam, she brings up as spirits and demons. She is sometimes a screech-owl; and she is sometimes a hairy night-monster. She is known as 'Primordial Lilith', 'Ancient Lilith', 'Grandmother Lilith the Great', 'Great Whore', 'Tortuous Serpent', and 'Blind Dragon'. And she is immortal.

Lilith, in Ted's poem is all of these things. She is a willow-dwelling screech-owl. "Her abortions" are the spilt sperm of the men she visits in dreams. And, because of her, a couple may remain childless and 'free' for each other. She comes to men in the darkness, arouses them, and, as they stroke the hairs on her legs²¹, she detects the "Mayday signal" ('Mayday', which is the international call-sign for help, here refers both to the man's urgent need for sexual relief and to pagan May Day fertility rites) under rings which no longer represent the harmonious unity of marriage but are simply "finger rings" (the paronomasia with 'fingerings' reflects the man's actions). Laughing, Lilith

seduces the man, and he, feverish in his fantasies, hallucinates her sexual voracity and her domination of him. She “rides him”, and he is helpless to resist her: so, his guilt is assuaged. Human psychology, common sexual and emotional needs, social and religious pressures, and guilt, all make this myth compelling and have ensured its survival. Amongst some superstitious Jewish people, rituals and talismans are still used to banish Lilith from their bedrooms and to protect their new-born children.

The myths about Nehama are similarly compelling and offer similar comfort to guilt-ridden men and women caught up in the chaos caused by powerful sexual drives and deep emotional needs. Nehama first appears in the Bible (Genesis 4:22) as the descendent of Cain and sister of the first artificer in metal, Tubal Cain. Since Cain was banished from the earth by God and, therefore, belongs to the qliphothic ‘other side’, Nehama is a demon and she, like Lilith, is immortal. In the Zohar, it is said that after Cain’s death, Adam kept separate from his wife, Eve, for 130 years, and that two female spirits, Lilith and Nehama came to copulate with him and bore demon children. But Adam was not Nehama’s only conquest. Because of her beauty, “the sons of God went astray after her” and, “to this day, she exists and her abode is among the waves of the great sea. And she comes forth and makes sport with the sons of man”²².

Unlike Lilith, Nehama does not want the children she bears and “all of them go to Lilith the Ancient, and she rears them”²³. And unlike Lilith, Nehama takes human form in order to have adulterous relationships with men. She is the consort of Sam’ael and is “always included with him” but she is said to have comforted Adam and Noah, Abraham and Isaac. In the Bible (Proverbs 7) and in similar verses in the Zohar, she is described as a predatory adulteress, who bedecks herself “like a harlot” with jewellery and perfume to entice “the simple ones”, young men who (like the man in Ted’s poem) are “devoid of understanding”. She woos them with kisses “in the black dark night”, saying “Come let us take our fill of love until the morning: Let us solace ourselves with loves”. So, although “her house is the way to hell”, “with her fair speech” she causes men to yield.

Nehama, in Ted’s poem is just like this but she is also subtly different. She has not just appeared in human form, she has taken over “some woman’s divorced and desperate body”, which become a living “corpse”, a “shadow”, a “tailor’s dummy”. The man is a “simpleton”. Like Adam, he has “quit” his wife. But the reason Ted gives for his having done this makes little sense unless the word ‘television’ is broken down to its root meaning and the position of this poem at Binah, the seat of the Great Goddess on the Sephirothic Tree, is taken into account. If this is done, ‘tele’ (Greek for ‘at a distance’) vision suggests that the man had visionary powers which allowed him to see through the veil of illusion which hides the Truth in our world and which is created and guarded by Binah. Beyond the veil of Binah is wisdom, understanding and Truth. This is what Nehama seems to offer this man, and she uses all her charms to “numb him” to any rational or moral “pangs” which might distract him, and to convince him that “he’s found it”.

Assia Wevill was twice divorced and she was still married to David Wevill when the

relationship between her and Ted began. Ted, too, was still married to Sylvia, although they would soon separate. So, the relationship between Assia and Ted was adulterous. Assia, according to most reports, was an intelligent and attractive woman who wore stylish clothes and expensive perfumes. She had, it seems, boasted to friends that she would seduce Ted. She worried about losing her looks and, until Shura was born, she had never wanted children. She was also a displaced person who had been born in a country which was, shortly afterwards, at war with Britain, so, in the common English expression of the times she came from the “other side”, although the accent she had acquired since leaving Germany disguised this. Her father was Jewish, and Ted’s imagery in this poem draws on the religious practice of some Jewish women who shave their heads and wear wigs, but there is no evidence that Assia ever adopted this practice.

The parallels between the woman in this poem and Assia Wevill are remarkable. But this is partly because the myth of Nehama is based on a common human scenario. It is also because Ted chose to pick out only those things about Assia which fitted his Cabbalistic purpose and established the deities of the Underworld as his ‘Crown’ for this Path of the Sword.

In any case, whether the woman in this poem is taken to be Assia or not, this woman is possessed by Nehama. It is Nehama who does not want to be pregnant and who sees and fears the skull beneath the skin of the suckling baby. It is Nehama (who is immortal) who smells death and corruption in the woman whose body she occupies, and is horrified by it. And it is Nehama who sacrifices the “baby-skull” and goes through “Death’s oven-door” with the child and the woman to give that child to Grandmother Lilith.

Nehama, like the wig on the tailor’s dummy, is a simulacrum of a real, living thing; a decorative but false temporary adornment: but the woman and the man are human, and so must die. In the structure of Ted’s poem, the break which separates “Let it watch her” from “In the Irish mirror”, but which is not reinforced by punctuation, effectively allows both the mortals in this poem (the possessed woman and the wretched bridegroom who “understands nothing”) to be reflected in the “Irish mirror”. Magical mirrors that reveal the truth or the future are common in Irish mythology, and in this one the image of both mortals is that of a skull grinning down.

The merging of myth and fact in this poem is chilling and awesome, but that Ted intended the woman in the poem to be not just Assia but also a manifestation of the Great Goddess in human form, is reinforced by two other images.

The first, like the suggestion that the man quit his wife because of the truth-revealing power of television, is awkward and out of place if taken at face value. Nehama’s “fingers/ Her knees, her armpits” are described as “flying/ Buttresses of Dover Cliffs”. We may imagine limbs as white as the Dover chalk, but there would have been many better and more appropriate ways of describing this, and Ted was certainly capable of finding one. Chalky whiteness and the link with the sea must have been important to

him here, and both, as he well knew are associated with Leucothea, the White Goddess. She, like Nehama, once had human form. She, too, killed herself and her child. She, too, was given immortality as a goddess of the sea. And she, too, buttressed (in a manner of speaking) and supported men in distress: most notably, when she gave Odysseus her veil to use as protection when Poseidon's storms threatened to drown him. The full story of Leucothea is told by Robert Graves in *Greek Myths*²⁴. But he wrote of her, too, in *The White Goddess*, and also of another Goddess, Leucippe (White Mare), who appears later in the *Capriccio* sequence as the "familiar" of the woman in the poems²⁵. Virgin

The second image which links the woman/Nehama to the Great Goddess is the final image of the poem, in which "Her last / backward glance / seals a star" between the bridegroom's eyes. Certainly, events may well have marked the man's forehead with a permanent star-like frown. But for Cabbalists a seal has magical power²⁶. And the star is the most important symbol of the Goddess, present on images of her from the earliest Mesopotamian clay tablets to the most recent religious paintings and icons²⁷. Between the eyes, too, is a point of mystical significance: it is the place of the Third Eye, the Ajan chakra, the locus of energies associated with intuitive insight, spirit-to-spirit communication, and with our deepest spiritual powers. So, in effect, the Goddess marked this man as one of her chosen: one called to serve her and one with whom she might communicate directly. In Ted's mythological understanding, even such a glancing choice as this would have been equivalent to a shamanic call.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Publication details on the endpage of *Capriccio: Poems by Ted Hughes, Engravings by Leonard Baskin*, The Gehenna Press, 1990.)
2. Neil Spencer, *True as the Stars Above*, Gollacz, London, 2000. pp.51-2.
3. In Cabbala, 3 is the number of the Goddess at Binah, and of the Path of the High Priestess in Tarot. It is a mystical number which combines the divine power of 1 with the force of 2 and brings them into dynamic equilibrium. $6 = 3 \times 2$: the Goddess's powers doubled. It is common Cabbalistic practice to refer to numbers by digits rather than by words.
4. Ann Skea, diary notes of a conversation with Ted Hughes in 1995. These notebooks are now in the British Library archives.
5. Carol Bere noted it in a scholarly paper in 1992, but her paper did not appear in print until 2004. Bere, C. 'Complicated with Old Ghosts', in Moulin (Ed.) *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, Routledge, London, 2004. pp. 29-37.
6. Helene, C. *The Sacred Science of Numbers*, DeVorss, CA, 1997. p. 93. This book will be referred to in the text as SSN.

7. Crowley discusses the Cabbalist's Sword in detail in Ch. VIII, 'The Sword', of his *Magick*, Book IV.
8. Scholem, G. *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1969. pp. 128-9.
9. Carol Bere noted that the tone of the narrative voice in *Capriccio* is less "intimate" and "conversational" than in *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers* and that "the speaker tends to be more of a passive respondent". 'Complicated with Old Ghosts', *op.cit.* p. 37.
10. 'Canticles' appears in the original 1990, Gehenna Press publication. Ted changed this to 'Song of Songs' in *Ted Hughes: New Selected Poems 1951-1994*.
11. Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 Encyclical, 'God is Love'. Catholic Encyclopedia (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03302a.htm>).
12. Scholem's discussion of this aspect of Cabbala in *On the Kabbala and its Symbolism*, *op. cit.* pp. 104-9, is invaluable background reading for understanding Ted's linking of Assia with demonic powers in *Capriccio*.
13. The Zohar or Book of Splendour is a collection of texts which are mostly commentaries on the Jewish Torah and on the unseen mysteries therein. It is generally believed to have been transcribed from earlier documents by the Spanish Jew, Moses de Leon in the 13th century.
14. Scholem, *On the Kabbala and its Symbolism*, *op. cit.* p. 59.
15. *ibid.* p.107.
16. Feinstein, E. *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 2001, p. 120.
17. Raphael Patai, *Sitrei Torah* 1:147b-8, at (<https://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Topic/Lilith/Index.html>).
- "The male is called Sam'ael
his female is always included within him.
Just as it is on the side of holiness,
so it is on the other side."
18. *Ibid.* Zohar 3:76b-77a
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.* 1:147b-148b.

21. It is said that King Solomon became convinced that the seductive and exotic Queen of Sheba was actually Lilith, because of the hair on her legs.

22. Zohar, op. cit. 3:76b-77a.

23. Ibid.

24. Graves, R. Greek Myths, Cassell, London, 1955.

25. 'Familiar' (C 18).

26. Seals have always conveyed power. Seals are still used to authorize documents, and to represent the authority of a person or even, in business, an incorporated body. Similarly, magical seals are believed to convey the power of whichever god's symbol (or 'signature') is on them.

27. In Christian iconography, both star and moon are commonly associated with the Virgin Mary: the Goddess's eight pointed star often appears on her robes; the crescent moon beneath her feet.

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'Systole-Diastole', 'Descent', 'Folktale'

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Lioness

'Systole-Diastole' (C 4)

'Systole-Diastole' is the fourth poem of Capriccio. It lies at Chesed, Sephira 4, the Sephira of Mercy, Love and Sorrow, and it represents one end of the Venusian guard on the hilt of the Cabbalist's Sword. At the other end of this guard is Gevurah, Sephira 5, the seat of Justice, Severity, Strength and Fear. Between these two Sephiroth, the energies of Justice and Mercy alternate, like the two beats of the heart – systole-diastole (contraction – relaxation) – and, as for the heart, the harmonious balance of this rhythmic pulse is essential.

Systole-diastole, in this poem, describes the beat of the heart which is the subject of the poem. But in Cabbala and Alchemy, 'systole-diastole' has very specific meaning. It represents the bi-polar forces which govern the Universe and which, like the energies of

Chesed and Gevurah, exist in dynamic equilibrium.

In Lurian Cabbala, in particular, systole-diastole is related to the original Creation and the pneumatic inbreathing (tsimtsum or contraction) which preceded the first exhalation of the Word. It is related, too, to the powers of judgment.

Creation

In the tsimtsum, as the Jewish scholar of Cabbala, Gershom Scholem, writes: “the powers of judgment which in God’s essence were united in infinite harmony with the ‘roots’ of all other potencies, are gathered and concentrated in a single point, namely, the primordial space, or pleroma, from which God withdraws”¹. This original contraction was followed by exhalation and the “smelting out” of the powers of stern judgment from God’s essence into primordial space where they were mixed with a residue of God’s infinite light. Thus the ‘shells’, or qliphothic energies, came into existence. And although God remains hidden, his infinite light still “breaks through and falls into primordial space” as the lightning flash which creates and energizes the Sephirothic Tree. Most importantly, this process of contraction and emanation is continuous, for “Everything that comes into being after the ray of light from ein-sof has been sent out into the pleroma is affected by the twofold movement of the perpetual renewed tsimtsum and of the outward flowing emanation”.

Isaac Luria (1534-1572) drew his concept of tsimtsum from treatises older than the Zohar, but it is still controversial. In the context of the Path of the Sword, however, its explanation of the existence of qliphothic, unbalance energies and of the existence of stern judgment and its attendant evils is important.

In other versions of the Creation myth, inbreathing and exhalation (systole-diastole) produce the world of light and the world of darkness and all other dualities. And the energies of the Source reach the human heart in systolic-diastolic rhythm².

The heart is the seat of the Soul and the place of intersection between God and Man. This Divine-Human relationship is represented by the cross + which is the symbol of 4 – the mystical number of the Eternal Principle of Creation, the Door to Illumination and the number of Chesed.

Quoting Saint Martin on the subject of mystical numerology, Corinne Heline writes: “we are given to understand that 4 belongs properly to the Logos, the word that was in the Beginning, or in other words, to the World of Creation” (SSN 28). And since 4 also governs human creative abilities when they are “focused in the spiritual” (SSN 27) it is wholly appropriate that Ted’s poem, ‘Systole-Diastole’, should rest at Sephira 4 (Chesed) on the Sephirothic Tree.

There is a direct relationship, too, between ‘The Mythographers’(C 3) and ‘Systole-Diastole’, for not only is “the symbol of Four the Star” (SSN 32), but 4 is also the number associated with those who, like the shaman, have “qualified for that high and noble calling of conscious invisible helpers” (SSN 33). So, the star with which

the Goddess sealed the brow of the “bridegroom” in ‘The Mythographers’, thus marking him as her chosen one, continues to shine through the mystical number 4 at Chesed. And the Goddess herself is present in ‘Systole-Diastole’ as the Star-Goddess, Astarte, whose symbol in her dark manifestation as Goddess of War is a lioness. This Goddess’s ‘call’, which was described in ‘The Mythographers’, becomes in ‘Systole-Diastole’ a heart-devouring demand which, it seems, the protagonist initially tries to resist. Astarte

The opening lines of the poem state his dilemma. “Heart was the difficulty”. Heart, as the seat of the Soul, is the “god-head of the body”, the place where the Goddess, “the mother”, communicates directly and intuitively, spirit-to-spirit, with her children. But the “child” in this poem is reluctant to accept her demands.

To begin with, he is aware of her presence only as physical symptoms. His heart kicks, wrenches “to be free” of his body. It becomes “a panic heart”, its disturbed rhythm “bruising his ribs / Making his back ache”. The lioness, Astarte, as a demonic Goddess of War drinks human blood. But because this is the dark face of the Goddess of Love, she is, in Cabbalistic terms, the exiled Shekinah and, so, “thirsts for spirit” so that she may be reunited with God. For Cabbalists and Alchemists, and in many other spiritual beliefs, there exists in Man’s heart that “drop of spirit” which links him with God, but the demonic qlippothic excess of the lion/Goddess in this poem turns Chesed’s energies of love and mercy to devouring, “ravenous”, possessive and merciless lust.

The unrhymed triplets of Ted’s poem reinforce the Goddess’s presence, since 3 is her number. And the ambiguity created by lack of punctuation and enjambment binds the Goddess and the protagonist together, so that soul is clamped to soul in an iron grip that “no bodily force/ Could prise open”. “He”, the bridegroom of the Goddess-Shekinah, cannot escape her grip. So, trying some “desperate magic” he rips his “deranged heart the torn god” free and hides it “in the belly / Of a flower, where pollen might repair it”.

Many things about his poem find parallels in Ted’s life. In September 1961, shortly after he and Sylvia had moved to Devon, he did indeed suffer from violent heart fibrillations, which he also described in ‘The Lodger’ in Birthday Letters (BL 124. THCP 1124). Throughout Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers Ted identified Sylvia with the Goddess; and we know from Sylvia’s letters, journal and poems that she was possessive, jealous and unrelenting in her fierce, devouring love for Ted. So, it is tempting to see her as the Goddess in ‘Systole-Diastole’ and to read the poem as a description of that specific time in late 1962 when Ted and Assia began their relationship, and, according to Lucas Myers, Ted “decided not to die. [and] The fibrillations stopped immediately”³. Perhaps, too, the exotic flowers in ‘Systole-Diastole’ symbolize Assia, whose exotic beauty has frequently been noted.

Such an interpretation would make sense of the death of the lioness-Goddess (Sylvia) and of her ghost, which “tore up the flower” (suggesting Assia’s destruction, rather as Ted describes it in ‘The Error’ (C 17)) and which, with “ghost-fangs”, retrieved his heart

and carried it “back to her lair, in his chest” to “gnaw at it, lick at it, guard it” for her own purposes. It suggests, too, an explanation for the words of Sylvia’s ghost in ‘The Offers’ (H&W 10, THCP 1183): “Don’t fail me”.

However, whether or not Ted intended such a parallel, there is a Cabbalistic interpretation of the poem which is entirely consistent with its position at Chesed and, especially, with the underlying myth which Ted traced in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, in which he discerned and described Cabbalistic themes⁴.

In this myth, flowers have very specific meaning which is related to the wrath of the jealous Goddess (in her dark, Underworld manifestation); the death of her bridegroom (who has rejected her); and his transformation into a flower, from which he is subsequently reborn to unite with her in her aspect of Goddess of Love. As Ted wrote in Shakespeare and the Goddess... , the flower is: “a daemon of the Goddess – moving (like God’s will) in a mysterious way, to accomplish her ends... to break down the one who rejects her, and force him to atone, finally returning him to Divine Love” (SGCB 476).

And in a long footnote, in which he demonstrated his familiarity with both Christian and Hebrew Cabbala, Ted noted: “In Hebrew Cabbala the highest Sephirah the Divine Source, from which the lightning flash of creative power enters the structure of materialization, is both God and his female form, the Shekinah... . In the Christian Cabbala (...) the Shekinah becomes the Great Goddess” (SGCB 478).

So, in Cabbalistic terms, through rebirth from the flower and reunion with the Goddess, the Shekinah is rescued from exile and the male-female wholeness of the Godhead is restored.

In ‘Systole-Diastole’, the Goddess-tormented lover chose to bury his heart in flowers. But he was mistaken in believing that this would hide it from the Goddess, since flowers, too, are a product of her energies in our world, although they reflect her bright, fertile face rather than her demonic aspect. And there is special irony and significance in his comment that he “almost” chose the lotus for a hiding place, since the flowering lotus is widely accepted as a symbol of spiritual rebirth.

In the lover’s evasive action, Ted suggests his ‘false ego’- his self-deluding belief that he can choose, so easily, to escape the Goddess’s summons—and also his foolish naivety. But the Goddess is persistent, and having found his heart she will continue to “gnaw at it, lick at it, guard it” until he learns from his mistakes, sacrifices his ego (as does the shaman when he metaphorically becomes a skeleton in his descent to the Underworld), and accepts the redemptive task for which she has chosen him.

There is a strong suggestion in all this that Ted did regard himself as a shamanic poet and that he came to see the events of his life not only as resulting from his own mistakes but also from false ego and an unwillingness to give himself wholly to the Goddess’s work.

Perhaps (and this is speculation) he came to see the terrible things which happened as the sacrifice which the Goddess decreed he must make in order to learn not to reject her demands. Hence, the constant suggestion in the Capriccio, Birthday Letters, and Howls & Whispers sequences, that fate was responsible for all that happened. However, there is also a strong Cabbalistic theme underlying the biographical story in these sequences, and what this theme shows is that Ted and Sylvia and Assia each had choices to make, false ego to deal with, and important lessons to learn, and that all that occurred was the result of the qliphothic, but completely human, errors of all three.

'Descent' (C 5)

Inana

'Descent', which is the fifth poem of Capriccio, occupies Sephira 5, Gevurah (Judgment) on the Sephirothic Tree. It represents the other end of the Sword's Venusian guard to that at Chesed; and Gevurah's energies of Strength and Severity alternate with Chesed's energies of Mercy and Love.

The qliphothic energies of Gevurah are those of severe judgment, and in 'Descent' they are wielded by the Sumerian Goddess of Love and War, Inana, and her dark sister Erec-ki-gala, the ruler of the Underworld. Together, as twin Goddesses, they are the Sumerian equivalent of Astarte. Inana is named in Ted's poem: Erec-ki-gala is not. But the progressive stripping off of the seven symbolic articles of apparel which the woman in the poem undergoes, has an exact parallel in the Sumerian text which describes Inana's descent into her sister's Underworld realm⁵.

When Inana arrived at the gates of the Underworld "she pushed aggressively at the door.... She shouted aggressively at the gate"(ETCSL 73-77). Neti, the Chief Doorman, questioned her and bad her wait, then he went to his mistress Erec-ki-gala. "It is Inana, your sister", he told her. And he described Inana's aggressive behaviour and her appearance:

"She has taken the seven divine powers. She has collected the divine powers and grasped them in her hand. She has come on her way with all the good divine powers. She has put a turban, headgear for the open country, on her head. She has taken a wig for her forehead. She has hung small lapis-lazuli beads around her neck" (ETCSL 102-107).

"She has placed twin egg-shaped beads on her breast. She has covered her body with the pala dress of ladyship. She has placed mascara which is called "Let a man come" on her eyes. She has pulled the pectoral which is called "Come, man, come" over her breast. She has placed a golden ring on her hand. She is holding the lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line in her hand" (ETCSL 108-113).

Erec-ki-gala then instructed Neti to bolt the seven gates of the Underworld, then to open

them one-by-one. So, the progressive stripping away of all Inana wore and carried with her began:

“And when Inana entered...the first gate the turban, headgear for the open country, was removed from her head. “What is this?”. “Be satisfied, Inana, a divine power of the underworld had been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld”.

“When she entered the second gate, the small lapis-lazuli beads were removed from her neck. “What is this?”. “Be satisfied, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. You must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld” (ETCSL 129-143).

And so, at each of the seven gates, the ritual disrobement, question and answer were repeated until Inana was naked. Still she challenged Erec-ki-gala, ousting her from her throne and sitting there in her stead. But retribution was swift and deadly:

“The Anuna, the seven judges, rendered their decision against her. They looked at her – it was the look of death. They spoke to her – it was the speech of anger. They shouted at her – it was the shout of heavy guilt. The afflicted woman was turned into a corpse. And the corpse was hung on a hook” (ETCSL 164-172).

Inana was kept in the Underworld by the stern judgment of these seven judges. And the judgment of two of her heavenly ‘fathers’, Enlil and Nanna, was equally severe:

“Inana craved the great heaven and the great below as well. The divine powers of the underworld are divine powers which should not be craved, for whoever gets them must remain in the underworld. Who, having got to that place, could expect to come up again?” (ECTSL 190-194).

In Ted’s poem, the repeated phrase “You had to strip off” reflects the repetitions of the Sumerian texts. Like Inana, the woman (and the brief biographical details given in the poem identify her with Assia) “had to go underground”, “go deeper”, gradually disrobing, being “forced to strip off”, elements of her life until her “last raiment”, “the sole remnant” of everything that might hold her to life was stripped away and only “the bed in the underworld” remained.

The woman in Ted’s poem is referred to only as ‘you’. She could be any woman, real or fictional, but Ted included biographical details which matched some of the most significant events in Assia’s life.

To Assia and her family, the “crossed lightnings” of the cross-shaped Nazi swastika⁶ symbolized everything about the Germany from which they escaped. So, symbolically, they were stripped off.

It was not Israel to which Assia’s family went, because Israel did not gain independence

until May 1948, but to the British Protectorate of Palestine. Assia went to a school for well-off Arab children in the German enclave, and she left Palestine with a British soldier and was married to him in England in 1947. So, she stripped off Israel and the “cactus-hair” irritation, confinement, but also seemingly “bullet-proof” protection of Jewish family, culture and religion in a place which was to become, specifically, a home for Jews.

Assia’s father was of Russian descent, and he loved music, literature and the arts. It is likely that he taught Assia to love Pushkin’s work, but the romance, drama and satire of Pushkin’s writings clearly appealed to her in any case. She treasured a book of Pushkin’s poems, plays and prose which she inscribed with her married name, Assia Steele, in 1950, added the inscription Assia & David W. in 1956, and she kept it until her death⁷. Pushkin’s, Eugene Onegin, with its theme of romantic and ill-fated love, reflected Assia’s own life in some ways. Three times she had fallen in love and married. Three times these marriages ended in divorce. Her love affair with Ted, too, was romantic, compulsive, full of difficulties and ultimately ill-fated. The removal of ear-rings “worn in honour/ Of Eugene Onegin” (possibly the same leopard-claw ear rings, symbolic of Dionysian love, that are worn by the woman in ‘The Pan’ (BL 12, THCP 1120)), parallels the removal of Inana’s jewellery on her descent to the Underworld. The woman in Ted poem, however, was specifically stripping off “Russia”; and at the same time, perhaps, all allegiance to the romance and toils of human love.

Inana

In British Columbia, Assia had divorced her first husband and married again. Ted’s reference to the “fish-skin mock-up waterproof” with its “erotic motif / Of porcupine quills” may well describe something she wore, but its artificial nature, its “cannery” origin, its simulation of erectile porcupine quills, all suggest that this “waterproof” was, symbolically, a protective shield or mask which Assia eventually stripped off, just as she abandoned her marriage to Richard Lipsey when she fell in love with David Wevill. The painful quills, like the barbs and hurts associated with this brief marriage to Lipsey, however, were not so easily removed. They “pierced” her, “working deeper” and staying with her, just as love wounds always do.

“Finally”, all Assia’s masks, all her adopted Englishness, together with her three wedding rings, each signifying a new name and a new persona, had to be removed, just as Inana’s “golden ring was removed from her hand”. And, as in Inana’s descent, the next thing Assia loses as she goes deeper are her protective gems.

Inana had her lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line taken from her. These were symbols of the divine powers of the “great heaven” and tools through which its gods measured and weighed out their judgment. Lapis-lazuli is also the stone of Venus, Goddess of Love. In Ted’s poem, the gemstones are rubies and emeralds, stones related to Mars and Venus, whose powers are combined on the Path of the Sword. But by connecting these gemstones with “Urim and Thumin”, which were part of the High Priest’s jewelled breastplate in the Hebrew Temple, Ted made a direct link with Sumerian and Babylonian mythology.

The Hebrew Priest's breastplate was called "the breastplate of judgment" and Urim and Thumin are thought by Jewish scholars to be connected with the Tablets of Destiny which were held by the gods who wielded Truth and Justice in the Mesopotamian Creation myths. They are also believed to have been used by the Hebrews as a divine oracle - "the mysterious word of revelation"—and as "instruments through which Yhwh communicated His will to His chosen people"⁸.

In 'Descent', Urim and Thumin appear to symbolize the protection of the gods. But in the final extreme of Assia's anguish, "cowardly / They scatter", leaving her (like Inana) naked and unprotected, as the very last thing which might hold her to life, her daughter, is stripped from her. Her confusion, courage and determination pervade this poem. And throughout, the compulsion which drives her to go ever deeper, until nothing remains between her and "the bed / In the Underworld", is caught in the phrase "you had to" (and once, "you were forced to"). She is driven on by her own demons, her own insecurities, and the conflicts caused by the masks and personae she has adopted in order to fit into the many foreign cultures in which she lived. Finally, the severe judgment of others, and her own severe judgment of herself, stripped away all masks, all protection, and, in its qliphothic excess, it was stronger than the natural instincts of love, which are heard in the poem in her "choked outcry". So, with her "own hands", she punished herself by taking her daughter's life: nothing, then, was left to prevent her, or shield her, from death.

At the end of 'Descent', Ted makes explicit the parallel between the woman in the poem and Inana. But it is only Inana, with all her dangerous powers, who is left trapped "between strata / That can never be opened, except as a book". Having resurrected her in his poem, and given her a part in Assia's life and death, Ted had to ensure that Inana no longer existed in our world except as a Goddess about whom we may read in a book. So, acknowledging her by name, he used his poetic and Cabbalistic knowledge and skills to confine and control her, trapping her between the strata of his lines and, with his final words, decreeing the limits of her powers.

Folk Tale

'Folktale' (C 6)

'Folktale' the sixth poem in Capriccio, occupies Sephira 6, Tiphereth (Beauty) at the very heart of the Sephirothic Tree. It also represents the broadest part of the steel Martian blade of the Cabbalist's Sword, where the letters AGLA are etched into it with oil of VITRIOL (Sulphuric acid)⁹. Metaphorically, these attributes of the Sword represent the Divine guidance the Cabbalist seeks when wielding it and the dissolving, acidic powers associated with its use.

Alch Wedding

As benefits the energies of Tiphereth, which are balanced on the Pillar of Equilibrium, 'Folktale' sets out a seeming balance of desires between "He" and "She" (capitalized

throughout the poem). Tiphereth is ruled by the Sun and here, in Cabbala and Alchemy, the male and female essences are exposed to the Sun's burning light before being united in an alchemical 'wedding'. Here, too, the vitriolic Sword must burn through the emotional matrix of the male/female relationship in order to clearly reveal whatever qlipthotic energies lie at its heart. Because of the dangerous, vitriolic nature of this process, Ted needed to remain as rational and detached as possible, so his use of pronouns instead of names in this poem is especially appropriate.

At Tiphereth our Sun is a worldly reflection of the energies of the Source, but the male/female relationship of the couple at Tiphereth must be balanced and harmonious in order to burn with the true Beauty of Love. The qlipthoth of Tiphereth is 'Hollowness', and the title of Ted's poem, 'Folktale', suggests the distorted reflection of true Love which prevails in this poem.

"He" and "She" "ransacked each other" for "everything they lacked" and which they thought the other possessed. The unreality of their perceptions of each other is emphasized in the first two lines of the poem. "He" clearly did not know the truth behind her seeming boldness: did not see, behind the mask she presented to the world, the fragile being who had "risen", phoenix-like, "out of the cinders". "She", from the very beginning, confidently "knew he had nothing".

As in the Crow poem, 'Lovesong', "He" wanted "her whole past and future" ('Lovesong' C 88, THCP 225). He wanted (in 'Folktale') the Dionysian "leopard Ein-Gedi" that she might have brought from Palestine; tokens of her Russian ancestry; German "gutturals" made musical by her Arabic schooling; the mystical and magical hints of "Cabala" and "the ghetto demon" history of her Hebrew and Jewish people. "He" wanted the seven treasures of Asia", which are the inner powers of faith, perseverance, a sense of shame, avoidance of wrongdoing, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, but all he actually sought were the inherited, worldly treasures of skin, eyes, lips, blood, hair and ancestry. And, at the same time, he wanted a "mother" of sweetness and comfort.

The 'She', in 'Lovepet', wanted "him safe inside her / Safe and sure for ever and ever". In 'Folktale', "She" wanted the thrill and danger of a liaison with "a runaway slave" (whether the slavery is to her or to someone else, or both, is left uncertain) but she also wanted the fairytale romance of an "Eden-cool" "love-knot" with only a fairytale "child of acorn" to share it. She wanted "escape without a passport" – an unauthorized transgression of boundaries, but also the "heraldic" symbolism and status of his Englishness. And she wanted, the "shades" of his fiery "broken-armed" love of Sylvia – the cool shadows of it but not the full, dangerous burning force of it.

Ultimately, both wanted to begin their lives again. She wanted "the hill stream's tabula rasa" to wash away her past. He wanted to find the "thread end of himself" so that he could begin to untangle the muddle his life was in. So, and the phrase is repeated at the beginning and end of the poem to emphasize the divisive, destructive, warring nature of this pillaging, "they ransacked each other". But everything they wanted "could not be found": Not in themselves, nor in the other. And

the hollowness with which they began, and which they encountered as they struggled is clear in the final lines of the poem. Fingers, which at Tiphereth should have been entwined in peaceful harmony, instead, at their darkest moment “when midnight struck” were still wrestling in the “flames” and “crackling thorns” of “everything they lacked”.

Finally, in Cabbalistic terms and in true folktale tradition, there is a moral to this story. The Cabbalist’s work, at all times, is guided by the maxim ‘By equilibrium and self-sacrifice is the gate’. But in ‘Folktale, as the heart of the relationship is revealed, it is apparent that even when it was most necessary, this couple failed to see beyond their own wants, their own problems, and their own perception of the other. They failed to look deeper and to see each other in a more selfless and accepting way. Ultimately, when the witching hour of midnight struck and the dark energies were at their most disruptive, they still had not learned to balance eros and agape in their love. So, their relationship was doomed.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Scholem, G. On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, Schocken Books, N.Y., 1960. pp. 110-112.
2. This is found in the alchemical and mystical writings of Jacob Bohme (1575-1624) who called the polar forces of systole-diastole ‘divine wrath’ and ‘divine love’– ‘the yes and no in all’; and in the work of other Alchemists, Cabbalists and Rosicrucian’s.
3. Myers, L. Crow Steered Bergs Appeared, Proctor’s Hall Press, Tennessee, 2001. p.79.
4. This myth had particular relevance for Ted. Roy Davids, whose help and friendship Ted acknowledged in the Foreword, comments that “the book is as much about Ted Hughes as it is about Shakespeare”, and that Ted had “considered putting the whole Plath story on the stage of this book – behind the scenes even – using it as a metaphorical ground rather than writing Birthday Letters” (Appreciation of Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, under ‘Articles’ menu at <https://www.roydavids.com/>).
5. There are translations of these Sumerian myths in the Ted Hughes’ Library archive at Emory University, Atlanta, USA. All my quotations are from the beautifully translated version of Inana’s Descent to the Nether World to be found in The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford at <https://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/> This translation spells her name ‘Inana’, but Inanna (which Ted uses) is also common.
6. This ‘Thunder Cross’ was the symbol of the Prussian God, Percunis, God of thunder, fertility, law and order. It was adopted by Adolf Hitler as a symbol for the Third Reich before World War II.

7. This book is now in the Ted Hughes's Library archive at Emory University in Atlanta.

8. The Jewish Encyclopedia.com at
<https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=52&letter=U> .

9. In Cabbala, a Notarikon is a word made up from the letters of a phrase which it is designed to represent. AGLA is a Notarikon which represents "Ateh, Gibor, Leolam, and Adonai" : "To thee be the Power unto the Ages, o my Lord". VITRIOL (widely used in Alchemical manuscripts) is a Notarikon for "Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies": "By investigating everything and bringing it into proportion you will find the hidden Stone". Of VITRIOL, Crowley noted: "As an acid eats into steel... . so am I unto the Spirit of Man" (Crowley. Liber LXV, I, 16).

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'Systole-Diastole', 'Descent', 'Folktale'

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Lioness

'Systole-Diastole' (C 4)

'Systole-Diastole' is the fourth poem of Capriccio. It lies at Chesed, Sephira 4, the Sephira of Mercy, Love and Sorrow, and it represents one end of the Venusian guard on the hilt of the Cabbalist's Sword. At the other end of this guard is Gevurah, Sephira 5, the seat of Justice, Severity, Strength and Fear. Between these two Sephiroth, the energies of Justice and Mercy alternate, like the two beats of the heart – systole-diastole (contraction – relaxation) – and, as for the heart, the harmonious balance of this rhythmic pulse is essential.

Systole-diastole, in this poem, describes the beat of the heart which is the subject of the poem. But in Cabbala and Alchemy, 'systole-diastole' has very specific meaning. It represents the bi-polar forces which govern the Universe and which, like the energies of Chesed and Gevurah, exist in dynamic equilibrium.

In Lurian Cabbala, in particular, systole-diastole is related to the original Creation and the pneumatic inbreathing (tsimtsum or contraction) which preceded the first exhalation of the Word. It is related, too, to the powers of judgment.

Creation

In the tsimtsum, as the Jewish scholar of Cabbala , Gershom Scholem, writes: "the

powers of judgment which in God's essence were united in infinite harmony with the 'roots' of all other potencies, are gathered and concentrated in a single point, namely, the primordial space, or pleroma, from which God withdraws"1. This original contraction was followed by exhalation and the "smelting out" of the powers of stern judgment from God's essence into primordial space where they were mixed with a residue of God's infinite light. Thus the 'shells', or qlippothic energies, came into existence. And although God remains hidden, his infinite light still "breaks through and falls into primordial space" as the lightning flash which creates and energizes the Sephirothic Tree. Most importantly, this process of contraction and emanation is continuous, for "Everything that comes into being after the ray of light from ein-sof has been sent out into the pleroma is affected by the twofold movement of the perpetual renewed tsimtsum and of the outward flowing emanation".

Isaac Luria (1534-1572) drew his concept of tsimtsum from treatises older than the Zohar, but it is still controversial. In the context of the Path of the Sword, however, its explanation of the existence of qlippothic, unbalance energies and of the existence of stern judgment and its attendant evils is important.

In other versions of the Creation myth, inbreathing and exhalation (systole-diastole) produce the world of light and the world of darkness and all other dualities. And the energies of the Source reach the human heart in systolic-diastolic rhythm2.

The heart is the seat of the Soul and the place of intersection between God and Man. This Divine-Human relationship is represented by the cross + which is the symbol of 4 – the mystical number of the Eternal Principle of Creation, the Door to Illumination and the number of Chesed.

Quoting Saint Martin on the subject of mystical numerology, Corinne Heline writes: "we are given to understand that 4 belongs properly to the Logos, the word that was in the Beginning, or in other words, to the World of Creation" (SSN 28). And since 4 also governs human creative abilities when they are "focused in the spiritual" (SSN 27) it is wholly appropriate that Ted's poem, 'Systole-Diastole', should rest at Sephira 4 (Chesed) on the Sephirothic Tree.

There is a direct relationship, too, between 'The Mythographers'(C 3) and 'Systole-Diastole', for not only is "the symbol of Four the Star" (SSN 32), but 4 is also the number associated with those who, like the shaman, have "qualified for that high and noble calling of conscious invisible helpership" (SSN 33). So, the star with which the Goddess sealed the brow of the "bridegroom" in 'The Mythographers', thus marking him as her chosen one, continues to shine through the mystical number 4 at Chesed. And the Goddess herself is present in 'Systole-Diastole' as the Star-Goddess, Astarte, whose symbol in her dark manifestation as Goddess of War is a lioness. This Goddess's 'call', which was described in 'The Mythographers', becomes in 'Systole-Diastole' a heart-devouring demand which, it seems, the protagonist initially tries to resist. Astarte

The opening lines of the poem state his dilemma. "Heart was the difficulty". Heart, as the seat of the Soul, is the "god-head of the body", the place where the Goddess, "the mother", communicates directly and intuitively, spirit-to-spirit, with her children. But the "child" in this poem is reluctant to accept her demands.

To begin with, he is aware of her presence only as physical symptoms. His heart kicks, wrenches "to be free" of his body. It becomes "a panic heart", its disturbed rhythm "bruising his ribs / Making his back ache". The lioness, Astarte, as a demonic Goddess of War drinks human blood. But because this is the dark face of the Goddess of Love, she is, in Cabbalistic terms, the exiled Shekinah and, so, "thirsts for spirit" so that she may be reunited with God. For Cabbalists and Alchemists, and in many other spiritual beliefs, there exists in Man's heart that "drop of spirit" which links him with God, but the demonic qliphothic excess of the lion/Goddess in this poem turns Chesed's energies of love and mercy to devouring, "ravenous", possessive and merciless lust.

The unrhymed triplets of Ted's poem reinforce the Goddess's presence, since 3 is her number. And the ambiguity created by lack of punctuation and enjambment binds the Goddess and the protagonist together, so that soul is clamped to soul in an iron grip that "no bodily force/ Could prise open". "He", the bridegroom of the Goddess-Shekinah, cannot escape her grip. So, trying some "desperate magic" he rips his "deranged heart the torn god" free and hides it "in the belly / Of a flower, where pollen might repair it".

Many things about his poem find parallels in Ted's life. In September 1961, shortly after he and Sylvia had moved to Devon, he did indeed suffer from violent heart fibrillations, which he also described in 'The Lodger' in Birthday Letters (BL 124. THCP 1124). Throughout Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers Ted identified Sylvia with the Goddess; and we know from Sylvia's letters, journal and poems that she was possessive, jealous and unrelenting in her fierce, devouring love for Ted. So, it is tempting to see her as the Goddess in 'Systole-Diastole' and to read the poem as a description of that specific time in late 1962 when Ted and Assia began their relationship, and, according to Lucas Myers, Ted "decided not to die. [and] The fibrillations stopped immediately"³. Perhaps, too, the exotic flowers in 'Systole-Diastole' symbolize Assia, whose exotic beauty has frequently been noted.

Such an interpretation would make sense of the death of the lioness-Goddess (Sylvia) and of her ghost, which "tore up the flower" (suggesting Assia's destruction, rather as Ted describes it in 'The Error' (C 17)) and which, with "ghost-fangs", retrieved his heart and carried it "back to her lair, in his chest" to "gnaw at it, lick at it, guard it" for her own purposes. It suggests, too, an explanation for the words of Sylvia's ghost in 'The Offers' (H&W 10, THCP 1183): "Don't fail me".

However, whether or not Ted intended such a parallel, there is a Cabbalistic interpretation of the poem which is entirely consistent with its position at Chesed and, especially, with the underlying myth which Ted traced in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, in which he discerned and described Cabbalistic themes⁴.

In this myth, flowers have very specific meaning which is related to the wrath of the jealous Goddess (in her dark, Underworld manifestation); the death of her bridegroom (who has rejected her); and his transformation into a flower, from which he is subsequently reborn to unite with her in her aspect of Goddess of Love. As Ted wrote in *Shakespeare and the Goddess...*, the flower is: “a daemon of the Goddess – moving (like God’s will) in a mysterious way, to accomplish her ends... to break down the one who rejects her, and force him to atone, finally returning him to Divine Love” (SGCB 476).

And in a long footnote, in which he demonstrated his familiarity with both Christian and Hebrew Cabbala, Ted noted: “In Hebrew Cabbala the highest Sephirah the Divine Source, from which the lightning flash of creative power enters the structure of materialization, is both God and his female form, the Shekinah... . In the Christian Cabbala (...) the Shekinah becomes the Great Goddess” (SGCB 478).

So, in Cabbalistic terms, through rebirth from the flower and reunion with the Goddess, the Shekinah is rescued from exile and the male-female wholeness of the Godhead is restored.

In ‘Systole-Diastole’, the Goddess-tormented lover chose to bury his heart in flowers. But he was mistaken in believing that this would hide it from the Goddess, since flowers, too, are a product of her energies in our world, although they reflect her bright, fertile face rather than her demonic aspect. And there is special irony and significance in his comment that he “almost” chose the lotus for a hiding place, since the flowering lotus is widely accepted as a symbol of spiritual rebirth.

In the lover’s evasive action, Ted suggests his ‘false ego’- his self-deluding belief that he can choose, so easily, to escape the Goddess’s summons—and also his foolish naivety. But the Goddess is persistent, and having found his heart she will continue to “gnaw at it, lick at it, guard it” until he learns from his mistakes, sacrifices his ego (as does the shaman when he metaphorically becomes a skeleton in his descent to the Underworld), and accepts the redemptive task for which she has chosen him.

There is a strong suggestion in all this that Ted did regard himself as a shamanic poet and that he came to see the events of his life not only as resulting from his own mistakes but also from false ego and an unwillingness to give himself wholly to the Goddess’s work.

Perhaps (and this is speculation) he came to see the terrible things which happened as the sacrifice which the Goddess decreed he must make in order to learn not to reject her demands. Hence, the constant suggestion in the *Capriccio*, *Birthday Letters*, and *Howls & Whispers* sequences, that fate was responsible for all that happened. However, there is also a strong Cabbalistic theme underlying the biographical story in these sequences, and what this theme shows is that Ted and Sylvia and Assia each had choices to make, false ego to deal with, and important lessons to learn, and that all

that occurred was the result of the qliphothic, but completely human, errors of all three.

'Descent' (C 5)

Inana

'Descent', which is the fifth poem of Capriccio, occupies Sephira 5, Gevurah (Judgment) on the Sephirothic Tree. It represents the other end of the Sword's Venusian guard to that at Chesed; and Gevurah's energies of Strength and Severity alternate with Chesed's energies of Mercy and Love.

The qliphothic energies of Gevurah are those of severe judgment, and in 'Descent' they are wielded by the Sumerian Goddess of Love and War, Inana, and her dark sister Erec-ki-gala, the ruler of the Underworld. Together, as twin Goddesses, they are the Sumerian equivalent of Astarte. Inana is named in Ted's poem: Erec-ki-gala is not. But the progressive stripping off of the seven symbolic articles of apparel which the woman in the poem undergoes, has an exact parallel in the Sumerian text which describes Inana's descent into her sister's Underworld realm⁵.

When Inana arrived at the gates of the Underworld "she pushed aggressively at the door.... She shouted aggressively at the gate"(ETCSL 73-77). Neti, the Chief Doorman, questioned her and bad her wait, then he went to his mistress Erec-ki-gala. "It is Inana, your sister", he told her. And he described Inana's aggressive behaviour and her appearance:

"She has taken the seven divine powers. She has collected the divine powers and grasped them in her hand. She has come on her way with all the good divine powers. She has put a turban, headgear for the open country, on her head. She has taken a wig for her forehead. She has hung small lapis-lazuli beads around her neck" (ETCSL 102-107).

"She has placed twin egg-shaped beads on her breast. She has covered her body with the pala dress of ladyship. She has placed mascara which is called "Let a man come" on her eyes. She has pulled the pectoral which is called "Come, man, come" over her breast. She has placed a golden ring on her hand. She is holding the lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line in her hand" (ETCSL 108-113).

Erec-ki-gala then instructed Neti to bolt the seven gates of the Underworld, then to open them one-by-one. So, the progressive stripping away of all Inana wore and carried with her began:

"And when Inana entered...the first gate the turban, headgear for the open country, was removed from her head. "What is this?". "Be satisfied, Inana, a divine power of the underworld had been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld".

“When she entered the second gate, the small lapis-lazuli beads were removed from her neck. “What is this?”. “Be satisfied, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. You must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld” (ETCSL 129-143).

And so, at each of the seven gates, the ritual disrobement, question and answer were repeated until Inana was naked. Still she challenged Erec-ki-gala, ousting her from her throne and sitting there in her stead. But retribution was swift and deadly:

“The Anuna, the seven judges, rendered their decision against her. They looked at her – it was the look of death. They spoke to her – it was the speech of anger. They shouted at her – it was the shout of heavy guilt. The afflicted woman was turned into a corpse. And the corpse was hung on a hook” (ETCSL 164-172).

Inana was kept in the Underworld by the stern judgment of these seven judges. And the judgment of two of her heavenly ‘fathers’, Enlil and Nanna, was equally severe:

“Inana craved the great heaven and the great below as well. The divine powers of the underworld are divine powers which should not be craved, for whoever gets them must remain in the underworld. Who, having got to that place, could expect to come up again?” (ECTSL 190-194).

In Ted’s poem, the repeated phrase “You had to strip off” reflects the repetitions of the Sumerian texts. Like Inana, the woman (and the brief biographical details given in the poem identify her with Assia) “had to go underground”, “go deeper”, gradually disrobing, being “forced to strip off”, elements of her life until her “last raiment”, “the sole remnant” of everything that might hold her to life was stripped away and only “the bed in the underworld” remained.

The woman in Ted’s poem is referred to only as ‘you’. She could be any woman, real or fictional, but Ted included biographical details which matched some of the most significant events in Assia’s life.

To Assia and her family, the “crossed lightnings” of the cross-shaped Nazi swastika⁶ symbolized everything about the Germany from which they escaped. So, symbolically, they were stripped off.

It was not Israel to which Assia’s family went, because Israel did not gain independence until May 1948, but to the British Protectorate of Palestine. Assia went to a school for well-off Arab children in the German enclave, and she left Palestine with a British soldier and was married to him in England in 1947. So, she stripped off Israel and the “cactus-hair” irritation, confinement, but also seemingly “bullet-proof” protection of Jewish family, culture and religion in a place which was to become, specifically, a home for Jews.

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likely that he taught Assia to love Pushkin's work, but the romance, drama and satire of Pushkin's writings clearly appealed to her in any case. She treasured a book of Pushkin's poems, plays and prose which she inscribed with her married name, Assia Steele, in 1950, added the inscription Assia & David W. in 1956, and she kept it until her death⁷. Pushkin's, Eugene Onegin, with its theme of romantic and ill-fated love, reflected Assia's own life in some ways. Three times she had fallen in love and married. Three times these marriages ended in divorce. Her love affair with Ted, too, was romantic, compulsive, full of difficulties and ultimately ill-fated. The removal of ear-rings "worn in honour/ Of Eugene Onegin" (possibly the same leopard-claw ear rings, symbolic of Dionysian love, that are worn by the woman in 'The Pan' (BL 12, THCP 1120)), parallels the removal of Inana's jewellery on her descent to the Underworld. The woman in Ted poem, however, was specifically stripping off "Russia"; and at the same time, perhaps, all allegiance to the romance and toils of human love.

Inana

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"Finally", all Assia's masks, all her adopted Englishness, together with her three wedding rings, each signifying a new name and a new persona, had to be removed, just as Inana's "golden ring was removed from her hand". And, as in Inana's descent, the next thing Assia loses as she goes deeper are her protective gems.

Inana had her lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line taken from her. These were symbols of the divine powers of the "great heaven" and tools through which its gods measured and weighed out their judgment. Lapis-lazuli is also the stone of Venus, Goddess of Love. In Ted's poem, the gemstones are rubies and emeralds, stones related to Mars and Venus, whose powers are combined on the Path of the Sword. But by connecting these gemstones with "Urim and Thumin", which were part of the High Priest's jewelled breastplate in the Hebrew Temple, Ted made a direct link with Sumerian and Babylonian mythology.

The Hebrew Priest's breastplate was called "the breastplate of judgment" and Urim and Thumin are thought by Jewish scholars to be connected with the Tablets of Destiny which were held by the gods who wielded Truth and Justice in the Mesopotamian Creation myths. They are also believed to have been used by the Hebrews as a divine oracle - "the mysterious word of revelation"—and as "instruments through which Yhwh communicated His will to His chosen people"⁸.

In 'Descent', Urim and Thumin appear to symbolize the protection of the gods. But in the final extreme of Assia's anguish, "cowardly / They scatter", leaving her (like Inana) naked and unprotected, as the very last thing which might hold her to life, her daughter, is stripped from her. Her confusion, courage and determination pervade this poem. And throughout, the compulsion which drives her to go ever deeper, until nothing remains between her and "the bed / In the Underworld", is caught in the phrase "you had to" (and once, "you were forced to"). She is driven on by her own demons, her own insecurities, and the conflicts caused by the masks and personae she has adopted in order to fit into the many foreign cultures in which she lived. Finally, the severe judgment of others, and her own severe judgment of herself, stripped away all masks, all protection, and, in its qliphothic excess, it was stronger than the natural instincts of love, which are heard in the poem in her "choked outcry". So, with her "own hands", she punished herself by taking her daughter's life: nothing, then, was left to prevent her, or shield her, from death.

At the end of 'Descent', Ted makes explicit the parallel between the woman in the poem and Inana. But it is only Inana, with all her dangerous powers, who is left trapped "between strata / That can never be opened, except as a book". Having resurrected her in his poem, and given her a part in Assia's life and death, Ted had to ensure that Inana no longer existed in our world except as a Goddess about whom we may read in a book. So, acknowledging her by name, he used his poetic and Cabbalistic knowledge and skills to confine and control her, trapping her between the strata of his lines and, with his final words, decreeing the limits of her powers.

Folk Tale

'Folktale' (C 6)

'Folktale' the sixth poem in Capriccio, occupies Sephira 6, Tiphereth (Beauty) at the very heart of the Sephirothic Tree. It also represents the broadest part of the steel Martian blade of the Cabbalist's Sword, where the letters AGLA are etched into it with oil of VITRIOL (Sulphuric acid)⁹. Metaphorically, these attributes of the Sword represent the Divine guidance the Cabbalist seeks when wielding it and the dissolving, acidic powers associated with its use.

Alch Wedding

As benefits the energies of Tiphereth, which are balanced on the Pillar of Equilibrium, 'Folktale' sets out a seeming balance of desires between "He" and "She" (capitalized throughout the poem). Tiphereth is ruled by the Sun and here, in Cabbala and Alchemy, the male and female essences are exposed to the Sun's burning light before being united in an alchemical 'wedding'. Here, too, the vitriolic Sword must burn through the emotional matrix of the male/female relationship in order to clearly reveal whatever qliphothic energies lie at its heart. Because of the dangerous, vitriolic nature of this process, Ted needed to remain as rational and detached as possible, so his use of pronouns instead of names in this poem is especially appropriate.

At Tiphereth our Sun is a worldly reflection of the energies of the Source, but the male/female relationship of the couple at Tiphereth must be balanced and harmonious in order to burn with the true Beauty of Love. The qliphoth of Tiphereth is 'Hollowness', and the title of Ted's poem, 'Folktale', suggests the distorted reflection of true Love which prevails in this poem.

"He" and "She" "ransacked each other" for "everything they lacked" and which they thought the other possessed. The unreality of their perceptions of each other is emphasized in the first two lines of the poem. "He" clearly did not know the truth behind her seeming boldness: did not see, behind the mask she presented to the world, the fragile being who had "risen", phoenix-like, "out of the cinders". "She", from the very beginning, confidently "knew he had nothing".

As in the Crow poem, 'Lovesong', "He" wanted "her whole past and future" ('Lovesong' C 88, THCP 225). He wanted (in 'Folktale') the Dionysian "leopard Ein-Gedi" that she might have brought from Palestine; tokens of her Russian ancestry; German "gutturals" made musical by her Arabic schooling; the mystical and magical hints of "Cabala" and "the ghetto demon" history of her Hebrew and Jewish people. "He" wanted the seven treasures of Asia, which are the inner powers of faith, perseverance, a sense of shame, avoidance of wrongdoing, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, but all he actually sought were the inherited, worldly treasures of skin, eyes, lips, blood, hair and ancestry. And, at the same time, he wanted a "mother" of sweetness and comfort.

The 'She', in 'Lovepet', wanted "him safe inside her / Safe and sure for ever and ever". In 'Folktale', "She" wanted the thrill and danger of a liaison with "a runaway slave" (whether the slavery is to her or to someone else, or both, is left uncertain) but she also wanted the fairytale romance of an "Eden-cool" "love-knot" with only a fairytale "child of acorn" to share it. She wanted "escape without a passport" – an unauthorized transgression of boundaries, but also the "heraldic" symbolism and status of his Englishness. And she wanted, the "shades" of his fiery "broken-armed" love of Sylvia – the cool shadows of it but not the full, dangerous burning force of it.

Ultimately, both wanted to begin their lives again. She wanted "the hill stream's tabula rasa" to wash away her past. He wanted to find the "thread end of himself" so that he could begin to untangle the muddle his life was in.

So, and the phrase is repeated at the beginning and end of the poem to emphasize the divisive, destructive, warring nature of this pillaging, "they ransacked each other". But everything they wanted "could not be found": Not in themselves, nor in the other. And the hollowness with which they began, and which they encountered as they struggled is clear in the final lines of the poem. Fingers, which at Tiphereth should have been entwined in peaceful harmony, instead, at their darkest moment "when midnight struck" were still wrestling in the "flames" and "crackling thorns" of "everything they lacked".

Finally, in Cabbalistic terms and in true folktale tradition, there is a moral to this story. The Cabbalist's work, at all times, is guided by the maxim 'By equilibrium and self-sacrifice is the gate'. But in 'Folktale', as the heart of the relationship is revealed, it is

apparent that even when it was most necessary, this couple failed to see beyond their own wants, their own problems, and their own perception of the other. They failed to look deeper and to see each other in a more selfless and accepting way. Ultimately, when the witching hour of midnight struck and the dark energies were at their most disruptive, they still had not learned to balance eros and agape in their love. So, their relationship was doomed.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Scholem, G. On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, Schocken Books, N.Y., 1960. pp. 110-112.
2. This is found in the alchemical and mystical writings of Jacob Bohme (1575-1624) who called the polar forces of systole-diastole 'divine wrath' and 'divine love' – 'the yes and no in all'; and in the work of other Alchemists, Cabbalists and Rosicrucian's.
3. Myers, L. Crow Steered Bergrs Appeared, Proctor's Hall Press, Tennessee, 2001. p.79.
4. This myth had particular relevance for Ted. Roy Davids, whose help and friendship Ted acknowledged in the Foreword, comments that "the book is as much about Ted Hughes as it is about Shakespeare", and that Ted had "considered putting the whole Plath story on the stage of this book – behind the scenes even – using it as a metaphorical ground rather than writing Birthday Letters" (Appreciation of Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, under 'Articles' menu at <https://www.roydavids.com/>).
5. There are translations of these Sumerian myths in the Ted Hughes' Library archive at Emory University, Atlanta, USA. All my quotations are from the beautifully translated version of Inana's Descent to the Nether World to be found in The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford at <https://www-etcs.orient.ox.ac.uk/> This translation spells her name 'Inana', but Inanna (which Ted uses) is also common.
6. This 'Thunder Cross' was the symbol of the Prussian God, Percunis, God of thunder, fertility, law and order. It was adopted by Adolf Hitler as a symbol for the Third Reich before World War II.
7. This book is now in the Ted Hughes's Library archive at Emory University in Atlanta.
8. The Jewish Encyclopedia.com at <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=52&letter=U> .
9. In Cabbala, a Notarikon is a word made up from the letters of a phrase which it is designed to represent. AGLA is a Notarikon which represents "Ateh, Gibor, Leolam, and Adonai" : "To thee be the Power unto the Ages, o my Lord". VITRIOL (widely used in

Alchemical manuscripts) is a Notarikon for “Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies”: “By investigating everything and bringing it into proportion you will find the hidden Stone”. Of VITRIOL, Crowley noted: “As an acid eats into steel... so am I unto the Spirit of Man” (Crowley. Liber LXV, I, 16).

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‘Fanaticism’, ‘Snow’, ‘Rules of the Game’, ‘Possession’.

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Aphrodite

‘Fanaticism’ (C 7)

‘Fanaticism’ occupies Sephira 7, Netzach, on the Sephirothic Tree, and everything about this poem fits the Cabbalistic and numerical powers of this particular Sephira. Netzach (Victory) belongs to the Sphere of Venus and, so, is associated with the Goddess of Love. And, since the element of Netzach is water, Ted represents her in ‘Fanaticism’ as the Ancient Greeks’ Sea-Goddess, Aphrodite¹.

Aphrodite, however, had a lineage far older than her Greek name suggests. She was a Star goddess and a Moon goddess, and she appears in Mesopotamian mythology as a sister of Inana and of Astarte. Like them, she was both Goddess of Fertility and Goddess of War; and even in Ancient Greece, her dark and her light face were recognized: she was known as Aphrodite Urania, Goddess of pure and ideal love; Aphrodite Genetrix, Goddess of Marriage; Aphrodite Pandemos, Goddess of venal love, lust and war; and Aphrodite the Warrior. She was the essence of feminine beauty, seductive, voluptuous, and she was able to renew her virginity by bathing in her native element, the sea. She was also dangerous.

That the woman (or Assia), in ‘Fanaticism’, should have adopted the mask of Aphrodite, is entirely consistent with the direct link between human and Divine which is represented by Netzach’s number, 7. In Cabbalistic numerology, 7 represents 4 (“the quaternary of Form”, and the cross made by the intersection of divine and human creative energies on the material plane) plus. 3 (“the trinity of spirit”; the number of the Great Goddess and the number of the Supernal Triangle of Heavenly powers on the Sephirothic Tree). Suitably, Ted structured this poem to represent the powers of 7, as 4 plus 3, by creating it in four stanzas, each of three lines. The total number of lines, 12, also reduces in numerology to 3, thus giving the Goddess controlling power over the whole poem.

The energies of Netzach, like those of the Moon goddesses, govern moods, wants, desires and emotions. They foster empathy, but their qliphothic powers are those of 'Illusion' and 'Projection'. The Divine Will may be projected through a human agent: but a human may also project their own wants and needs onto a Divine being, act as they believe that god or goddess intends, and adopt this role as their persona or mask.

Just such a role was adopted by the woman in 'Fanaticism' when she exchanged her "face for the mask of Aphrodite". Suitably, since the 'Vision' of Netzach is 'a beautiful naked woman', she came naked (as was the ancient custom) laying everything she had "Before the door of Aphrodite's temple". She played her role with such fanaticism that she offered every material thing which represented her past life, just as "the drowned leave their clothes", including her marriage and the "plain security" of her "life-line" (a phrase which suggests both her destiny, as shown in the lines on her hand, and anything which might have saved her from disaster). All was offered for what she believed would be "holy years" dedicated to the service of the Goddess.

Yet, even if the woman had truly been channelling Aphrodite's most loving and creative powers, her unquestioning sacrifice and her adoption of the mask of Aphrodite as her own persona, was irrational, unbalanced and misguided. She projected an illusory Self. And, as the role became routine and habitual, she expressed all the qliphothic energies of Netzach.

Illusion was also present in her unreasoned and careless faith in Aphrodite. She "lightly" offered up her "future" and "laughed" as she determined an end-point to her service of the Goddess. Her words, "After forty I'll end it", ambiguously suggest her "serious" intention of ending her own life, but there was also an element of the Moon's magical prophetic powers in this statement, since Assia did end her life in her early forties.

"Forty" may well be a realistic age-limit to the role of a seductive goddess of fertility and love but the number also has a specific Cabbalistic meaning. As 10×4 , it signifies the fourfold completion of a Cabbalistic cycle (governed by 10) in which all four primary elemental forces are refined within "the sevenfold vehicle of man". This particular time of completion is described as "putting off the carnal and putting on the celestial" (SSN 29): it is a time of actual death or of metaphorical death and spiritual rebirth.

In 'Fanaticism', the Moon-Goddess's powers, as expressed in the "heave and spill" of fluctuating ocean tides, in reproduction, and in all the cyclical patterns of Nature which are governed by Earth's Moon, pervade the imagery. And the dark face of the Goddess is apparent in the "blood-clepsydra", which in Ted's poem turns an ancient water-clock which can work in darkness (unlike a sundial) into the continuous drip, drip, drip of blood measuring out this woman's life. The danger of this, the terrible waste of her sacrifice, and especially the emptiness of the persona she adopted, is summed up in the final line of the poem, where the repetition of the phrase, "empty clothes", bridges the gap between her original, unrealistic offering of her future to Aphrodite, and the abrupt end to that future with the stark reality of death. It is as if no-one had filled those clothes in the years between: as if her true Self had not existed.

This is a bleak, rational, unemotional summing-up of this woman's life. And the final sharp stab of the Cabbalist's Sword to the heart, is powerfully conveyed in the bleak, ordinary, but painful reality of the fate of this woman's empty clothes, "which Oxfam took".

Capriccio

'Snow' (C 8)

'Snow' is one of the most beautiful, sad and loving poems in Capriccio. It is full of the soft, cold glow of Mercury's light; the slow, ghostly drift of mood as the world fractures and cools; and the inexorable movement down through time and space into the earth as "the thick, loose flocculence / Of a life" burns out "in the air".

This beauty at Hod (Splendour) which is Sephira 8 on the Pillar of Form of the Sephirothic Tree, balances the steely harshness of Netzach, which lies opposite Hod on the Pillar of Force. But these two Sephiroth always work together and the power to connect gods and Man at this level of the Tree belongs to both.

Hod is in the Sphere of Mercury, whose number is 8. His energies are cosmic and, like the snow in this poem, he moves between Heaven and Earth. But his energies are polarized: all or nothing, "the casket or the rainbow", "personal limitation or spiritual freedom" (SSN 71). As in Alchemy, Mercury nurtures or destroys.

Mercury is the light-bringer who embodies a germ of the Sun, but his light is cold, like that of the Moon which crowns his symbol. Astronomical symbol of Mercury. He is the messenger of the gods, and the guide of the Soul in the Underworld. His caduceus, which is the emblem of his magical powers, bears a helix of entwined snakes which symbolize the cyclical, regenerative powers of Nature which link Heaven and Earth. The helix also incorporates the endless, linked spheres of the figure 8 which, when laid on its side represents infinity.

8 holds the secret of balance, but in 'Snow', because Hod gathers and gives expression to the pattern established in all the Sephiroth above it on the Tree, the balance tilts only one way, and all movement is downwards towards the earth and the "oven of empty fire" which is both the earth and the grave. It is important to note, here, that in Ted's lines it is the fire, not the oven, which is empty, for it is in Mercury's power either to nurture the spiritual fire within us and bring it to union with the Divine, or to bury a spirit which is empty of soul-fire.

Throughout this poem, Ted melts together images located in a fixed earthly, time-dominated location and images of cosmic timelessness and fluid, unending motion. The figure he pictures in the poem is both real and ghostly. The downhill walk which was a finite, factual event, becomes, in this poem, Ted's prophetic vision of Assia's death which at the time of the event he had not recognized as such, because he was "thinking of something else". But the vision remained in his memory, and so, Assia's

walk became “unending” and, for as long as Ted’s memory and his mental powers remained intact, it “could never end”. In order to magically ensure this, Ted stated its endlessness three times in his poem.

Hints of Assia’s Russian ancestry also move between the real and the unreal in this poem. The real, vivid beauty of the “soft chandeliers” of snowflakes on her “sparkly black fur hat” melts into the “ghostly wreckage / Of the Moscow Opera”. The “heather”, the “Pennine sheep”, the “cobbled hill”, and the “char-black buildings” converted to “closed cafes” and “Bronte gift shops”, all describe the real, Yorkshire village of Haworth: but the falling Heavens and the “constellations falling through Judean thorns” are the product of memory, intuition, feelings and imagination, linking Assia’s Jewish and Palestinian past with Biblical and pre-Biblical stories of death and rebirth, destruction and creation, on a spiritual and cosmic level.

In ‘Snow’, the gentle, protective, nourishing spirit of Mercury (described by Alchemists as the ‘maternal blood’ which nourishes the germ of Soul) is present in the “ghostly”, cloaking softness of the blanketing snow. It is there in words and phrases of the poem: in the feathery reflections of “[d]own on down”; the “fleeces” of the Pennine sheep; and the “flocculence” of life itself. But snow, in Ted’s poem, also exhibits Mercury’s Trickster nature and his cold and deadly powers: in the brief time taken for Assia’s “schoolfriends” to drink a cup of coffee on the battlefield, it immobilized their armoured tank and then “deepened over” their dead faces².

Assia “escaped” the fate of her schoolfriends, but she went “deeper” into the “falling flakes” which Cabbalistically suggest the qliphothic shells of the Lurianic failed creation. Realistically again, Ted offers us an image of the snow clinging to the “charcoal crimped black pony skin / coat” she was wearing, but her adoption of a mask in the companion Netzach poem, ‘Fanaticism’ suggests that this coat, like the “fish-skin mock-up waterproof” in ‘Descent’, is another metaphor for the dark mask she is constantly seen to wear in Capriccio in order to conceal her fears and insecurities. That the coat is described as “charcoal crimped”, with no comma between these two words, suggests not only its colour but also a skin crimped by hot charcoal, thus adding to the poem’s fire imagery and also suggesting that it protects the coat’s wearer from the “falling / Heavens” and the “falling constellations” which, in this poem, describe both snow and life.

Words, which belong to Mercury as the communicator between gods and Man, “seemed warm”: but in the subtle flow of Ted’s lines they also exhibited Mercury’s destructive power by melting away “Whatever was trying to cling”. And the snow’s ability to melt, flocculate, blanket, freeze and bury everything in the poem reflects Mercury’s alchemical power to ‘dissolve and coagulate’. Like snow, life itself in this poem is “burning out in air”: and air is the Element of both Mercury and Hod. Despite the snow’s splendour (and ‘Splendour’ is the meaning of ‘Hod’), Ted sees it “leaning” inexorably on Assia, folding her “under its cloak” and ushering her away, until every trace of her has vanished into air. And the anthropomorphic nature of the words which Ted chose, here, suggests the guiding spirit of Mercury, rather than inanimate snow.

In his final line, Ted carefully and magically enfolded Assia, together with Mercury, in air. It is air and nothingness into which she vanishes; and that she has gone “Back to where [she] came from”, cryptically suggests the Cabbalistic belief that she, like everything in our world, has returned to the nothingness which preceded the original Creation and which is continually re-created by the Divine contraction (tsimtsum) prior to each new creative exhalation.

Yet, Cabbalistically and Magically, there is also something more to this final line of ‘Snow’. In the structure of the poem, which has 32 lines, Ted ensured Mercury’s presence. Aleister Crowley wrote that 32 is “a Mercurial number, as if the solidity of matter was in truth eternal change”³. And, since 32 is 4 x 8, it symbolizes one complete earthly cycle of the interaction between a god (in this case, Mercury) and Man. In Cabbalistic numerology, 32 also reduces to 5, which represents “the spirit resurrected from the tomb of matter” (SSN 35): again Spirit (which is Mercury) and matter (Man)) are combined. So, it appears that Ted structured this poem in such a way as to ensured that it was governed by Mercury: but he also set a limit to Mercury’s presence by “Closing the air” behind the vanishing figures in the final line of the poem. Thus, he clearly and deliberately returned Mercury to his own element, but he did not banish him: rather, he ensured that the infinite, linked circles of his energies, symbolized by the number 8, remained unbroken.

‘Rules of the Game’ (C 9)

Capriccio

The ebb and flow of tides, governed by the Moon is clearly present in this poem, which occupies Sephira 9, Yesod (Foundation), on the Sephirothic Tree.

Yesod’s Sphere is the Moon, and its element the Aether⁴. It is the most magical of the Sephiroth, and its energies are those of the emotions, the imagination, the senses and the subconscious. It is the ‘foundation’ of instincts, beliefs, attitudes (valid and fanciful) which shape our nature and are expressed in our behaviour and our personality. Yesod represents the Lower Self, the self-realization which we achieve through the two-way interaction of Yesod with emanations from both Malkuth, Sephira 10 (the World), and from the Sephiroth of the Upper Tree. It is an interface, a channel for this two-way flow of energies, a mirror which reflects either the Upper Tree or the World. And, because Yesod is governed by the Moon, it may also act as a magic mirror which reflects dream images, fantasies, intuitions and extra-sensory perceptions.

‘The Rules of the Game’ concerns the deep instinct-driven perceptions which drive the behaviour of two individuals. Neither is named, so the game and its rules may be universal, but it is clear that Assia and Sylvia were once players and that Ted’s poem is based on their version of the game.

So, what is this game? And what are the rules?

The game, it seems, is based on human insecurity, atavism, jealousy and a false sense

of justice. It is based on one person's belief that someone else is "lucky", has "too much", and that they themselves, by comparison, have "absolutely nothing". It is based, too, on the human practice of justifying one's actions by resorting to common platitudes. So, the player who claims that "nature abhors a vacuum", is able to feel justified, "for nature's sake", in doing whatever is necessary to fill their own vacuum and "redress the balance".

Although the 'rules' of this game are based on common human psychology, and perceptions about the "luck" of another and self-justification such as is demonstrated in Ted's poem are very common, the value-system and sense of justice on which they are based are false. And at Yesod, the lunar energies sway the emotions and act like a mirror to reflect an image of Self and Other which is unreal and distorted.

In Ted's poem, the little that the thieving player took to begin the game, seemed to make no difference at all to the balance of luck between the two players. The other person still had too much, and still went on with life as before, just as if the theft had not happened and the thief did not exist. The guilty thief, selfishly consumed by feelings of emptiness and desires which seemed like urgent needs, saw this as a demonstration of the other's deliberate scorn: it was as if she herself was unimportant and the other, consumed by "ambition", had arrogantly and actively screwed her up (as it were) "like a crossed-out page, tossed into a basket".

This subjective interpretation of the other's behaviour allowed the thief to feel angry and to justify more predation. She saw the seeming pride of the other as "hubris" which deserved retribution, so, "on behalf of the gods", she determined to "correct" it. Feeling "a little touch of hatred", too, was (as is often the case) enough to steady "the nerves" for more theft, until nothing of value remained.

The tide, to begin with, flowed all one way. But the other player, too, was self-absorbed: too busy with her own personal ambitions to care about other people or to stop the theft before everything of real value was lost. This player's pursuit of her own desires and her own apparent needs, and her perception of herself, was also false.

In both players, there was instability and illusion, but eventually, at Yesod, the tide will always turn, the natural energies will flow in the other direction, and the balance will change. Even death will not stop this, because Yesod responds to the flow of energies from Malkuth and death is part of the natural cycle of energies of the World. Only an influx of energy from the upper Tree could have changed the imbalance evident in Ted's poem, but for this to happen the players would have had to change themselves. In order to do this, they would have had to enlarge their perspective enough to appreciate the wants and needs of others; to have seen and examined everything in a more realistic, truthful way; to have examined themselves and their own values; and to have changed their behaviour accordingly. These are the rules of the game at Yesod.

In Sylvia's and Assia's case such changes did not happen, and the structure of Ted's poem reflects the imbalance which persisted and which was fatal to them both. There

are 29 lines to this poem, which reduces numerologically to 11, the Master number which embraces the opposites and governs equilibrium and change. For 22 lines, comprising one Cabbalistic journey and the expanded powers of 11, the flow is all one way and the taking continues until the original balance is completely reversed and the other has “Nothing”. This first magical exchange of Self for Other in the Yesodic mirror is now complete, and in the next four lines (4 brings everything down to earth) there is a pause, but the change of direction is inevitable and inexorable. So, at this point, when the thief realized, “Too late”, that now that she had everything she had “too much”, the change had already begun. In the final three lines of the poem, linked to the rest of the poem by “Only you”, she is left alone to face the ghostly smile of her rival as the tide begins to flow the other way.

Ted’s approach in this poem, as befitted that of a Cabbalist on Path of the Sword, was allegorical, rational, impersonal and objective. At a Sephira where the Moon holds sway over emotions, dreams and imagination, this was both necessary and wise.

‘Possession’ (C 10)

Capriccio

‘Possession’, as the tenth poem in Capriccio, occupies Sephira 10, Malkuth (The World). Malkuth is known as ‘The Gate of the Shadow of Death’ and ‘The Gate of Justice’. It occupies the Sphere of Matter and its Element is Earth: so, it is the place of life and death; the place from which all life began and to which all life returns. On the Sephirothic Tree, Malkuth is furthest from the Divine Source and, through Yesod, it collects the emanations from the upper Sephiroth. Most importantly, Malkuth lies on the threshold of the Underworld and of the Averse Tree of qliphothic fragments and demonic energies. Only at Malkuth can a Cabbalist or magician invoke and control energies from the ‘other side’ with ease and in comparative safety, for only at Malkuth can these energies from the ‘other side’ be safely ‘earthed’.

In ‘Possession’, demons from the ‘other side’ are named and their human Priestesses evoked. It is a poem full of spirits, mediumship, shamanic trance, prophetic speaking-in – voices, magic and mesmerism. But to balance this, there are demon-slayers, such as the Biblical Josiah, and spirit-channellers and exorcists, such as the medium Estelle Roberts⁵ and the prophetic woman in the shamanic trance.

The Virtue of Malkuth is Discrimination, especially the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal. But in ‘Possession’ it is clear from the first lines of the poem that this virtue is what the woman in the poem lacks. In particular, she cannot discriminate Self from the “demons” which seem to possess her.

At Malkuth, all the emanations from the Upper Tree are gathered via Yesod, where the Moon holds sway. So, ‘Possession’ gathers together all those dark-faced Goddesses and demonic energies which have been present in the earlier Capriccio poems. But this poem is also full of stern judgment and harsh justice wielded by Biblical and historical figures, as well, finally, as by the Priestess of the Goddess, Bastet, who is yet one more form of the dark face of the exiled Shekinah whose presence as ‘Lower Mother’ and

'Bride' is Cabbalistically most important at Malkuth.

'Possession', like Malkuth, also holds the energies from the earliest times of human evolution: the natural, social, spiritual and psychological history which forms "the subterranean river system" which is our common inheritance. This was the "provenance" of all the demons, gods, Biblical and historical figures named in this poem, all of whom were created and recorded by our ancestors, whose common and individual genetic inheritance we each carry in the lines on the palms of our hands. 'Possession', therefore, is a poem which is as much about human nature in general as it is about a particular individual.

Yet, the woman in the poem has a specific history and personality through which these "ancestors" are expressed. Her "dresses", the "incense" of her perfume, her "oiled smile", the "snarling" behaviour of her "schoolfriends' mothers" and her "hysterical", "spinning" state which Ted "saw plain", all identify her, "Maybe", with Assia. Throughout the poem, however, often within the space of a single line, her identity shifts and she becomes the "Princess of Thammuz", "the Babylonian / Mystery", a "hysteric", "Tabubu / Mesmerist Priestess of Bastet". All these, as is appropriate to Malkuth, are human and worldly representatives of the Goddess.

Demonic possession, as Ted noted at the beginning of the poem, may be possible. "African / Exorcists" do, indeed, "take it for granted". And Estelle Roberts did, indeed, deal "face-to-face, with some hard cases". "Maybe" the strange, exotic allure which masked Assia's essential fragility and insecurity was a form of possession. Maybe it was something which was "never credited", only "suffered". But, as Ted asks in this poem, "who" were these demons? And "where from?". In particular, although Ted does not spell out this question, the Cabbalist, for whom nothing happens by chance, would seek the deeper, spiritual meaning for their presence and ask "What was their purpose?".

Ted tells us the answer to the first two questions, but the answer to the third can only be found (intuited perhaps, since this poem is a channel for Malkuth's magical energies) in the Cabbalistic nature of Capriccio, and in the poem's position in this particular journey. The answer to the question is also closely tied up with all the most ancient Mysteries, all of which have their roots in Malkuth.

From the Cabbalistic point of view, Malkuth is the Sephira with which we are all most familiar, since it contains all the fragmented energies of our own world. But it is also the most mysterious Sephira, since its energies are responsible for the marriage between the world-dwelling, exiled Shekinah (the feminine potencies in God "which attain their fullest expression" in Malkuth⁶ as 'Lower Mother' and 'Bride') and her Bridegroom ('The King'; the God manifest in Nature, whose god-name at Malkuth is Adonai / Adonis / Lord).

Only through this marriage and its consummation at Yesod (which is the phallic male potency and the 'Foundation' of all life⁷) can the Shekinah be redeemed from exile, the

tikkun or 'harmonious correction' be achieved, and the female and male potencies in God be reunited.

In our world, the re-enactment of this sacred marriage was at the heart of the ancient Mysteries; and the magical / religious purpose of such ritual re-enactments has always been the basis of the belief in the mystical or holy nature of sexual union between a man and a woman within the limits of sacred rites and, in most religions, within marriage.

All of this is relevant to the Cabbalistic meaning of 'Possession'. But Cabbalistic ritual performed at Malkuth has three more purposes which are equally relevant to this poem and to Ted's whole Capriccio journey. To borrow from a list provided by Gershom Scholem in his informed discussion of Cabbalistic ritual⁸, these are:

1. "Redemption of the Shekinah", not only from exile in our world but also "from the 'other side'";
2. "Harmony between the rigid powers of judgment and the flowing powers of mercy";
3. "Defense against, or mastery over, the powers of the 'other side'", which, as has already been discussed, is the whole purpose of the Path of the Sword.

According to Scholem, only a perfect Zaddik (a 'righteous individual' or a person of integrity who is able to channel the Divine energies and who, in Ted's terms, is the equivalent of a shaman) can accomplish the meditation whereby he is able to "leap into the abyss of the other side" and "bring up the spirits of holiness" or light from amongst the qlippothic fragments which have fallen there⁹. Essentially, the Zaddik's journey is the same as that of a shaman. It is also the same as that of a shamanic poet practicing similar healing rituals in his poetry. But every such journey to the 'other side' for healing energies requires sacrifice: and the ritual sacrifice of Self, at the human level, parallels the mythic wounding and death of those Nature gods whose rebirth was part of the ancient Mysteries and brought renewed fertility to our world.

Sacrifice, the sexual rites and Mysteries of the sacred marriage, justice and mercy, and the confrontation and control of demons, all are part of the underlying theme of 'Possession'. To see this, one needs to look beneath the surface level of the poem, because in Cabbala, as the Zohar puts it, truth "is clothed in garments, which are the stories of this world".

In the case of 'Possession', the stories of the world to which Ted turned were the two fundamental stories which he identified in Shakespeare's work: the story of "the Great Goddess and her consort, the sacrificed god, the myth of one of the most widespread and profoundly rooted religions of the archaic world", and the story of "the Great Goddess and the Goddess-destroying god" (SGCB 2-3). Ted's own familiarity with these stories, and his awareness of their persistence from the earliest Sumerian versions right up to those of the present day, is evident in the summary of their history which he provides in the long 'Introduction' to Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being (SGCB 1-43).

The first of these mythological figures mentioned in 'Possession' is Thammuz, who was the Babylonian god of fertility, consort of Inanna / Ishtar / Astarte. His annual death was the reason for the sterility of winter, and his rebirth brought with it the renewed fertility of spring. Yet, in the earliest Sumerian myths, Inanna's own death and rebirth and her own return from the Underworld were responsible for the changing seasons. And it was her severe judgment of Thammuz's behaviour in her absence (he rejoiced) which caused her to choose him as the substitute required by her sister, Ereki-gala, as a condition of her release from the Underworld. Thammuz, therefore, became the sacrificed god, and each year Inanna returned to the Underworld to search for him and revive him. Over time, however, Thammuz came to replace the Great Goddess as the most important figure in the fertility myths, and it was at his temples that priestesses presided over rites of sacrifice and prophecy, and the sexual rituals associated with the sacred marriage and fertility.

At the same time, in Babylonian myth, another male god, Marduk, son of the Earth Goddess, Ea, stole from Inanna the Tablets of Destiny by which she held sway over all human affairs on Earth, and he became the enforcer of law in the Babylonian pantheon.

Later, in Sumeria and Palestine, the god Baal, consort of Astarte / Anat, fulfilled the roles of both Thammuz and Marduk. And it was the temples of Baal (as Milton describes in thrilling detail in the middle of Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*¹⁰) that the Biblical Josiah, pious king of Jerusalem and worshipper of Jehovah, destroyed because "the book of law" (another form of the Tablets of Destiny) had been ignored, and idolatrous worship "unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven" had taken place, as well as sodomy and other "abominations" (II Kings: 5).

In particular, the Bible describes Josiah's destruction of the temple on Mount Zion which was built on the site of King Solomon's temple on the hill of Moriah. And Ted's specific reference to the "temple of Zion" and "that cave" in 'Possession' seems to be a cryptic reference to both the Book of Law and to another sacrificed and resurrected God, Jesus Christ¹¹. His later reference to the "crown of thorns" also suggests this, although the Judean thorn and (in Europe) thorny holly crowns were also associated with pagan myths and mysteries.

From the Biblical account of Josiah's actions it is not possible to know the true nature of the mysteries and magic associated with the worship of Baal, since Josiah's severe judgment, in the name of his own god, demonized all other gods, desecrated their places of worship and slew their priests. It is apparent, however, that again the followers of a male god had usurped the power which had once belonged to the Great Goddess, and that yet another male god, Jehovah, had come to rule in her place. No wonder her anger was extreme. No wonder "The Babylonian / Mystery" demonstrated that anger by grinding "the crown of thorns" between her thighs. And by using her thighs in this way she also implied the sexual power which she yet retained. In the Goddess's behaviour, however, and in that of her priestesses and of the usurping male gods and their priests, it is severe judgment, rather than mercy or any more balanced approach, which is apparent.

Again, in 'Possession', the Goddess's anger and the dark power which she embodies are present in the spinning, spirit-possessed "hysteric" who, "Brainwashed by the Aurora Borealis" uttered "The cries of Mongolian birds" before she spoke with a prophetic voice "Which split the threshold granite / and the future". The Moon and Star Goddesses of many countries have been associated with the strange, electrical displays of lights of the Aurora Borealis in Northern skies. In Orkney, North of Scotland, it is said that the Arctic Girl is dancing¹²; and the peoples of far North of America have similar stories. In Mongolia, as Ted clearly knew, there is a Slavic Moon Goddess, Zorya (Aurora)¹³, who is threshold guardian of the Sun God's palace and also guards the Doomsday Hound which is chained the star constellation, Ursa Minor. At dawn, Zorya opens the gates of the palace for her husband, the Sun God, to emerge, and at dusk she closes them again. Like Inanna, Astarte and other Moon and Star Goddesses, she is associated with fertility and magic, and she is also a Goddess of War whose protection is sought by warriors with the incantation: "Unsheathe, O virgin, the sacred sword of thy father..."¹⁴.

The war-like power and anger of the Goddess is demonstrated in 'Possession' by the "arrival" of a prophetic, granite-splitting voice which issues from the mouth of the woman "spinning in the dust and smoke". And because of Malkuth's position on the threshold of the Underworld, it is the exiled, demonized dark-faced Goddess who is heard. Linked to her, in the same line, is "Tabubu", the "Mesmerist Priestess" of another ancient Moon Goddess, Bastet¹⁵, who also acts as a vehicle for the Goddess's darkest and most dangerous energies.

Tabubu's punishment of Setnau Kha-Em-Uast, who was son of an Egyptian Pharaoh, High Priest of Ptah at Memphis, a learned man and a skilful magician, was just as Ted describes it in 'Possession'. And the reason for her seduction and humiliation of Setnau, as told by Egyptologist, Wallis Budge¹⁶, was because of his theft and use (or misuse in the Goddess's terms) of the Book of Thoth, which he took from the tomb of Ptah-Nefer-Ka and his wife / sister Ahura. The God, Thoth, who was brother and 'voice' of the Egyptian Sun God, Ra, was the measurer and enumerator of Earth and the recorder and judge of the human soul. He wore the Goddess's moon (crescent and full) on his head; and his 'Book' was equivalent to the Tablets of Destiny which, in Mesopotamian myths, had first belonged to Inanna.

Once again, in the story of Tabubu and Setnau, the theft and misuse of power and authority which had originally belonged to the Goddess provoked her wrath; so, through her priestess, she extracted her revenge by using her sexual magic¹⁷.

In the earlier mythologies referred to in 'Possession', it had been male gods who usurped the Goddess's authority over human affairs. Setnau was human, but the result was the same. Each time, the Goddess's anger and jealousy resulted in the male's sacrifice, a wounding or a death and rebirth intimately connected with fertility. Each time, she used the sexual, magical and regenerative energies which always remained hers to punish the offender and to teach him a lesson. But Ted's use of these stories in

'Possession' leaves us with the question of what sort of lesson it was that Setnau had to learn, and, given the biographical nature of the Capriccio sequence, how all this related to both to Ted's relationship with Assia and to his overall purpose on the Path of the Sword.

What did Setnau learn? He learned that the mesmerizing power of the Goddess, channelled through a beautiful and seductive woman, could arouse such sexual desire in him that he was completely overwhelmed by it. He learned that under her spell, he would blindly agree to any request she made, even to the sacrifice of his wife and children. And he learned, when the spell was lifted, that he had been unable to distinguish the real from the unreal, to discriminate truth from illusion. He learned, too, not to ignore prophecies and warnings about the extreme danger of seeking to own and use knowledge which rightly belonged to the Goddess: and that whatever magic he might arrogantly think he had mastered, her magic was always stronger.

Ted, looking back at his relationship with Assia as he wrote these poems, may well have seen all these lessons as applicable to himself. In retrospect, as other poems in the complete Birthday Letters, Howls & Whispers and Capriccio cycle show, he was able to see his own blindness and naivety, his own enthrallment, his own lack of attention to the jealous Goddess's warnings. As in 'Snow', he was "thinking of something else", and so, with the deaths of Sylvia, Assia and Shura, he was condemned and entered the period of darkness and creative sterility which was equivalent to Thammuz's incarceration in the Underworld, and to Setnau's complete abasement.

Writing to Keith Sagar on the 18th of June, 1998, just a few months before his own death, Ted said that after Sylvia's death he had suffered "three years of impasse" before beginning to write poetry again with Crow. He went on to say that in 1969, Assia's and Shura's deaths, and that of his mother, had "knocked Crow off his perch". By 1971, when he began his collaboration with Peter Brook, his own writing was "totally suspended", except for Prometheus on his Crag, which he described in an earlier letter to Sagar as "an expression of limbo – limbo in Persia, but limbo"¹⁸. Only in 1972, with the purchase of Moortown Farm and his necessary closeness to nature whilst farming there, did Ted's poetic rebirth seem to begin, as if, like his own Adam in Adam and the Sacred Nine, he had found renewed creative energy "Through the sole of a foot" pressed to the Goddess's earth.

Yet, Ted's own story of the Goddess's dethronement, exile and demonization, and of her jealous, sexual and magical revenge, does not end with 'Possession'. Nor does his account of the abasement of the human male, as represented by Setnau, complete the Capriccio sequence. Having brought us to the threshold between our world and the Underworld at Malkuth, Ted ended this poem with a colon. The sentence (literally and metaphorically) is not complete. Nor has this journey on the Path of the Sword yet ended.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Goddess Venus, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, calls on Poseidon to recognize her claims for his support:

"Ocean, where once I grew, should own my claim,
Since formed from foam, I bear in Greek that name"

The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, English version by A.E. Watts, University of California, 1954. Book 4, lines 617-9.

2. These schoolfriends were, presumably, amongst the German soldiers who died fighting the Russians on the Steppe around Stalingrad in the Winter of 1941-2.

3. Crowley, A. 777, Weiser, Boston, MA, 1977. p. 30.

4. The Aether is an invisible, unexplained, fifth element, a kind of force-field which binds our physical world together and in which all other mysterious, unexplained energies, like gravity, magnetism and light, as well as energies associated with the spirit and the soul, function.

5. Estelle Roberts (1889-1970) was a widely respected English medium who was very influential in the Spiritualist movement. She held huge and remarkable sÃ©ances at the Royal Albert Hall in London, and in her autobiography, *Fifty Years a Medium*, she describes many public sÃ©ances and 'healings'. Occasionally she confronted spirits "face-to-face", rather than through her spirit guide, and on one such occasion she questioned, then exorcised, a spirit which had been filling a young man with an almost irresistible urge to murder his mother.

6. Scholem, G. *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, Schocken Books, NY, 1996, p. 104.

7. Op. cit. p. 104.

8. Op. cit. p. 130. The whole of chapter 4 of Scholem's book deals with Kabbalistic ritual and is very relevant to this discussion of 'Possession'.

9. Op. cit. p. 133. The Zaddik's ritual leap into the abyss of the 'other side' is essentially the same as the journey of the fully-fledged shaman who, in Ted's words, "can enter a trance at will and go to the spirit world... to get... ;a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs". Faas, E. *The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, USA, 1980. p. 206.

10. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton also links the various myths of sacrificed gods across the centuries. He writes of

"Thammuz...

Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
In amorous ditties all the summer's day,
While smooth Adonis from his native rock
Ran purple to the sea, supposed with blood

Of Thammuz's yearly wound".

11. There is an ancient cave on Mount Zion which holds the tombs of King David, King Solomon and other kings of the Davidic line. The Sefer Torah (the Hebrew Book of Law) is held there. It is also the reputed site of the Last Supper, which Jesus held with his disciples before his crucifixion. Ted visited the Dome of the Rock Cave when on a British Council assignment in Israel in 1971. He spoke of it in an interview as "the most sacred and important place, where rites were probably performed, a place of shamans, of visionaries". Negev, Lover of Unreason, Robson, USA, 2007.

12. 'Aurora' a poem by Orkney poet, George Mackay Brown, whose work Ted knew and enjoyed, begins "The Arctic girl is out tonight / (Come to the doors) / She dances... " Brown, Selected Poems 1954-1992, John Murray, London, 1992. P.114.

13. In some accounts, Zorya is a star goddess whose husband, Myesyats is the Moon God. Sometimes, too, she is a triple goddess. She is always associated with the night and, as the midnight star, she is responsible for the resurrection of the Sun God.

14. New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, Hamlyn, 1982. p.294.

15. The form, the yellow eyes, the association with magic, witchcraft, fertility and death, and the double nature of Bastet, the Egyptian Cat-Goddess, clearly link her with all the earlier Moon Goddesses.

16. Budge, E.W. Egyptian Magic, Dover Books, NY, 1971. P. 142-6.

17. It was Thoth who originally demanded revenge for the theft of his book by Ptah-Nefer-Ka and his sister, both of whom died because of this. But it was the Goddess's priestess who cast the spell over Setnau because, in his pride, he ignored the Goddess's warnings.

18. Ted Hughes to Keith Sagar, 26 March 1973. Both these letters are held in the British Library manuscript archive. Dep. 10003.

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'Fanaticism', 'Snow', 'Rules of the Game', 'Possession'.

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Aphrodite

'Fanaticism' (C 7)

'Fanaticism' occupies Sephira 7, Netzach, on the Sephirothic Tree, and everything about this poem fits the Cabbalistic and numerical powers of this particular Sephira. Netzach (Victory) belongs to the Sphere of Venus and, so, is associated with the Goddess of Love. And, since the element of Netzach is water, Ted represents her in 'Fanaticism' as the Ancient Greeks' Sea-Goddess, Aphrodite¹.

Aphrodite, however, had a lineage far older than her Greek name suggests. She was a Star goddess and a Moon goddess, and she appears in Mesopotamian mythology as a sister of Inana and of Astarte. Like them, she was both Goddess of Fertility and Goddess of War; and even in Ancient Greece, her dark and her light face were recognized: she was known as Aphrodite Urania, Goddess of pure and ideal love; Aphrodite Genetrix, Goddess of Marriage; Aphrodite Pandemos, Goddess of venal love, lust and war; and Aphrodite the Warrior. She was the essence of feminine beauty, seductive, voluptuous, and she was able to renew her virginity by bathing in her native element, the sea. She was also dangerous.

That the woman (or Assia), in 'Fanaticism', should have adopted the mask of Aphrodite, is entirely consistent with the direct link between human and Divine which is represented by Netzach's number, 7. In Cabbalistic numerology, 7 represents 4 ("the quaternary of Form", and the cross made by the intersection of divine and human creative energies on the material plane) plus 3 ("the trinity of spirit"; the number of the Great Goddess and the number of the Supernal Triangle of Heavenly powers on the Sephirothic Tree). Suitably, Ted structured this poem to represent the powers of 7, as 4 plus 3, by creating it in four stanzas, each of three lines. The total number of lines, 12, also reduces in numerology to 3, thus giving the Goddess controlling power over the whole poem.

The energies of Netzach, like those of the Moon goddesses, govern moods, wants, desires and emotions. They foster empathy, but their qlippothic powers are those of 'Illusion' and 'Projection'. The Divine Will may be projected through a human agent: but a human may also project their own wants and needs onto a Divine being, act as they believe that god or goddess intends, and adopt this role as their persona or mask.

Just such a role was adopted by the woman in 'Fanaticism' when she exchanged her "face for the mask of Aphrodite". Suitably, since the 'Vision' of Netzach is 'a beautiful naked woman', she came naked (as was the ancient custom) laying everything she had "Before the door of Aphrodite's temple". She played her role with such fanaticism that she offered every material thing which represented her past life, just as "the drowned leave their clothes", including her marriage and the "plain security" of her "life-line" (a phrase which suggests both her destiny, as shown in the lines on her hand, and anything which might have saved her from disaster). All was offered for what she believed would be "holy years" dedicated to the service of the Goddess.

Yet, even if the woman had truly been channelling Aphrodite's most loving and creative

powers, her unquestioning sacrifice and her adoption of the mask of Aphrodite as her own persona, was irrational, unbalanced and misguided. She projected an illusory Self. And, as the role became routine and habitual, she expressed all the qliphothic energies of Netzach.

Illusion was also present in her unreasoned and careless faith in Aphrodite. She “lightly” offered up her “future” and “laughed” as she determined an end-point to her service of the Goddess. Her words, “After forty I’ll end it”, ambiguously suggest her “serious” intention of ending her own life, but there was also an element of the Moon’s magical prophetic powers in this statement, since Assia did end her life in her early forties.

“Forty” may well be a realistic age-limit to the role of a seductive goddess of fertility and love but the number also has a specific Cabbalistic meaning. As 10×4 , it signifies the fourfold completion of a Cabbalistic cycle (governed by 10) in which all four primary elemental forces are refined within “the sevenfold vehicle of man”. This particular time of completion is described as “putting off the carnal and putting on the celestial” (SSN 29): it is a time of actual death or of metaphorical death and spiritual rebirth.

In ‘Fanaticism’, the Moon-Goddess’s powers, as expressed in the “heave and spill” of fluctuating ocean tides, in reproduction, and in all the cyclical patterns of Nature which are governed by Earth’s Moon, pervade the imagery. And the dark face of the Goddess is apparent in the “blood-clepsydra”, which in Ted’s poem turns an ancient water-clock which can work in darkness (unlike a sundial) into the continuous drip, drip, drip of blood measuring out this woman’s life. The danger of this, the terrible waste of her sacrifice, and especially the emptiness of the persona she adopted, is summed up in the final line of the poem, where the repetition of the phrase, “empty clothes”, bridges the gap between her original, unrealistic offering of her future to Aphrodite, and the abrupt end to that future with the stark reality of death. It is as if no-one had filled those clothes in the years between: as if her true Self had not existed.

This is a bleak, rational, unemotional summing-up of this woman’s life. And the final sharp stab of the Cabbalist’s Sword to the heart, is powerfully conveyed in the bleak, ordinary, but painful reality of the fate of this woman’s empty clothes, “which Oxfam took”.

Capriccio

‘Snow’ (C 8)

‘Snow’ is one of the most beautiful, sad and loving poems in Capriccio. It is full of the soft, cold glow of Mercury’s light; the slow, ghostly drift of mood as the world fractures and cools; and the inexorable movement down through time and space into the earth as “the thick, loose flocculence / Of a life” burns out “in the air”.

This beauty at Hod (Splendour) which is Sephira 8 on the Pillar of Form of the Sephirothic Tree, balances the steely harshness of Netzach, which lies opposite Hod on the Pillar of Force. But these two Sephiroth always work together and the power to

connect gods and Man at this level of the Tree belongs to both.

Hod is in the Sphere of Mercury, whose number is 8. His energies are cosmic and, like the snow in this poem, he moves between Heaven and Earth. But his energies are polarized: all or nothing, “the casket or the rainbow”, “personal limitation or spiritual freedom” (SSN 71). As in Alchemy, Mercury nurtures or destroys.

Mercury is the light-bringer who embodies a germ of the Sun, but his light is cold, like that of the Moon which crowns his symbol Astronomical symbol of Mercury. He is the messenger of the gods, and the guide of the Soul in the Underworld. His caduceus, which is the emblem of his magical powers, bears a helix of entwined snakes which symbolize the cyclical, regenerative powers of Nature which link Heaven and Earth. The helix also incorporates the endless, linked spheres of the figure 8 which, when laid on its side represents infinity.

8 holds the secret of balance, but in ‘Snow’, because Hod gathers and gives expression to the pattern established in all the Sephiroth above it on the Tree, the balance tilts only one way, and all movement is downwards towards the earth and the “oven of empty fire” which is both the earth and the grave. It is important to note, here, that in Ted’s lines it is the fire, not the oven, which is empty, for it is in Mercury’s power either to nurture the spiritual fire within us and bring it to union with the Divine, or to bury a spirit which is empty of soul-fire.

Throughout this poem, Ted melts together images located in a fixed earthly, time-dominated location and images of cosmic timelessness and fluid, unending motion. The figure he pictures in the poem is both real and ghostly. The downhill walk which was a finite, factual event, becomes, in this poem, Ted’s prophetic vision of Assia’s death which at the time of the event he had not recognized as such, because he was “thinking of something else”. But the vision remained in his memory, and so, Assia’s walk became “unending” and, for as long as Ted’s memory and his mental powers remained intact, it “could never end”. In order to magically ensure this, Ted stated its endlessness three times in his poem.

Hints of Assia’s Russian ancestry also move between the real and the unreal in this poem. The real, vivid beauty of the “soft chandeliers” of snowflakes on her “sparkly black fur hat” melts into the “ghostly wreckage / Of the Moscow Opera”. The “heather”, the “Pennine sheep”, the “cobbled hill”, and the “char-black buildings” converted to “closed cafes” and “Bronte gift shops”, all describe the real, Yorkshire village of Haworth: but the falling Heavens and the “constellations falling through Judean thorns” are the product of memory, intuition, feelings and imagination, linking Assia’s Jewish and Palestinian past with Biblical and pre-Biblical stories of death and rebirth, destruction and creation, on a spiritual and cosmic level.

In ‘Snow’, the gentle, protective, nourishing spirit of Mercury (described by Alchemists as the ‘maternal blood’ which nourishes the germ of Soul) is present in the “ghostly”, cloaking softness of the blanketing snow. It is there in words and phrases of the poem:

in the feathery reflections of “[d]own on down”; the “fleeces” of the Pennine sheep; and the “flocculence” of life itself. But snow, in Ted’s poem, also exhibits Mercury’s Trickster nature and his cold and deadly powers: in the brief time taken for Assia’s “schoolfriends” to drink a cup of coffee on the battlefield, it immobilized their armoured tank and then “deepened over” their dead faces².

Assia “escaped” the fate of her schoolfriends, but she went “deeper” into the “falling flakes” which Cabbalistically suggest the qliphothic shells of the Lurianic failed creation. Realistically again, Ted offers us an image of the snow clinging to the “charcoal crimped black pony skin / coat” she was wearing, but her adoption of a mask in the companion Netzach poem, ‘Fanaticism’ suggests that this coat, like the “fish-skin mock-up waterproof” in ‘Descent’, is another metaphor for the dark mask she is constantly seen to wear in Capriccio in order to conceal her fears and insecurities. That the coat is described as “charcoal crimped”, with no comma between these two words, suggests not only its colour but also a skin crimped by hot charcoal, thus adding to the poem’s fire imagery and also suggesting that it protects the coat’s wearer from the “falling / Heavens” and the “falling constellations” which, in this poem, describe both snow and life.

Words, which belong to Mercury as the communicator between gods and Man, “seemed warm”: but in the subtle flow of Ted’s lines they also exhibited Mercury’s destructive power by melting away “Whatever was trying to cling”. And the snow’s ability to melt, flocculate, blanket, freeze and bury everything in the poem reflects Mercury’s alchemical power to ‘dissolve and coagulate’. Like snow, life itself in this poem is “burning out in air”: and air is the Element of both Mercury and Hod. Despite the snow’s splendour (and ‘Splendour’ is the meaning of ‘Hod’), Ted sees it “leaning” inexorably on Assia, folding her “under its cloak” and ushering her away, until every trace of her has vanished into air. And the anthropomorphic nature of the words which Ted chose, here, suggests the guiding spirit of Mercury, rather than inanimate snow.

In his final line, Ted carefully and magically enfolded Assia, together with Mercury, in air. It is air and nothingness into which she vanishes; and that she has gone “Back to where [she] came from”, cryptically suggests the Cabbalistic belief that she, like everything in our world, has returned to the nothingness which preceded the original Creation and which is continually re-created by the Divine contraction (tsimtsum) prior to each new creative exhalation.

Yet, Cabbalistically and Magically, there is also something more to this final line of ‘Snow’. In the structure of the poem, which has 32 lines, Ted ensured Mercury’s presence. Aleister Crowley wrote that 32 is “a Mercurial number, as if the solidity of matter was in truth eternal change”³. And, since 32 is 4 x 8, it symbolizes one complete earthly cycle of the interaction between a god (in this case, Mercury) and Man. In Cabbalistic numerology, 32 also reduces to 5, which represents “the spirit resurrected from the tomb of matter” (SSN 35): again Spirit (which is Mercury) and matter (Man)) are combined. So, it appears that Ted structured this poem in such a way as to ensure that it was governed by Mercury: but he also set a limit to Mercury’s presence by

“Closing the air” behind the vanishing figures in the final line of the poem. Thus, he clearly and deliberately returned Mercury to his own element, but he did not banish him: rather, he ensured that the infinite, linked circles of his energies, symbolized by the number 8, remained unbroken.

‘Rules of the Game’ (C 9)

Capricio

The ebb and flow of tides, governed by the Moon is clearly present in this poem, which occupies Sephira 9, Yesod (Foundation), on the Sephirothic Tree.

Yesod’s Sphere is the Moon, and its element the Aether⁴. It is the most magical of the Sephiroth, and its energies are those of the emotions, the imagination, the senses and the subconscious. It is the ‘foundation’ of instincts, beliefs, attitudes (valid and fanciful) which shape our nature and are expressed in our behaviour and our personality. Yesod represents the Lower Self, the self-realization which we achieve through the two-way interaction of Yesod with emanations from both Malkuth, Sephira 10 (the World), and from the Sephiroth of the Upper Tree. It is an interface, a channel for this two-way flow of energies, a mirror which reflects either the Upper Tree or the World. And, because Yesod is governed by the Moon, it may also act as a magic mirror which reflects dream images, fantasies, intuitions and extra-sensory perceptions.

‘The Rules of the Game’ concerns the deep instinct-driven perceptions which drive the behaviour of two individuals. Neither is named, so the game and its rules may be universal, but it is clear that Assia and Sylvia were once players and that Ted’s poem is based on their version of the game.

So, what is this game? And what are the rules?

The game, it seems, is based on human insecurity, atavism, jealousy and a false sense of justice. It is based on one person’s belief that someone else is “lucky”, has “too much”, and that they themselves, by comparison, have “absolutely nothing”. It is based, too, on the human practice of justifying one’s actions by resorting to common platitudes. So, the player who claims that “nature abhors a vacuum”, is able to feel justified, “for nature’s sake”, in doing whatever is necessary to fill their own vacuum and “redress the balance”.

Although the ‘rules’ of this game are based on common human psychology, and perceptions about the “luck” of another and self-justification such as is demonstrated in Ted’s poem are very common, the value-system and sense of justice on which they are based are false. And at Yesod, the lunar energies sway the emotions and act like a mirror to reflect an image of Self and Other which is unreal and distorted.

In Ted’s poem, the little that the thieving player took to begin the game, seemed to make no difference at all to the balance of luck between the two players. The other person still had too much, and still went on with life as before, just as if the theft had not happened and the thief did not exist. The guilty thief, selfishly consumed by feelings of

emptiness and desires which seemed like urgent needs, saw this as a demonstration the other's deliberate scorn: it was as if she herself was unimportant and the other, consumed by "ambition", had arrogantly and actively screwed her up (as it were) "like a crossed-out page, tossed into a basket".

This subjective interpretation of the other's behaviour allowed the thief to feel angry and to justified more predation. She saw the seeming pride of the other as "hubris" which deserved retribution, so, "on behalf of the gods", she determined to "correct" it. Feeling "a little touch of hatred", too, was (as is often the case) enough to steady "the nerves" for more theft, until nothing of value remained.

The tide, to begin with, flowed all one way. But the other player, too, was self-absorbed: too busy with her own personal ambitions to care about other people or to stop the theft before everything of real value was lost. This player's pursuit of her own desires and her own apparent needs, and her perception of herself, was also false.

In both players, there was instability and illusion, but eventually, at Yesod, the tide will always turn, the natural energies will flow in the other direction, and the balance will change. Even death will not stop this, because Yesod responds to the flow of energies from Malkuth and death is part of the natural cycle of energies of the World. Only an influx of energy from the upper Tree could have changed the imbalance evident in Ted's poem, but for this to happen the players would have had to change themselves. In order to do this, they would have had to enlarge their perspective enough to appreciate the wants and needs of others; to have seen and examined everything in a more realistic, truthful way; to have examined themselves and their own values; and to have changed their behaviour accordingly. These are the rules of the game at Yesod.

In Sylvia's and Assia's case such changes did not happen, and the structure of Ted's poem reflects the imbalance which persisted and which was fatal to them both. There are 29 lines to this poem, which reduces numerologically to 11, the Master number which embraces the opposites and governs equilibrium and change. For 22 lines, comprising one Cabbalistic journey and the expanded powers of 11, the flow is all one way and the taking continues until the original balance is completely reversed and the other has "Nothing". This first magical exchange of Self for Other in the Yesodic mirror is now complete, and in the next four lines (4 brings everything down to earth) there is a pause, but the change of direction is inevitable and inexorable. So, at this point, when the thief realized, "Too late", that now that she had everything she had "too much", the change had already begun. In the final three lines of the poem, linked to the rest of the poem by "Only you", she is left alone to face the ghostly smile of her rival as the tide begins to flow the other way.

Ted's approach in this poem, as befitted that of a Cabbalist on Path of the Sword, was allegorical, rational, impersonal and objective. At a Sephira where the Moon holds sway over emotions, dreams and imagination, this was both necessary and wise.

'Possession' (C 10)

Capriccio

'Possession', as the tenth poem in Capriccio, occupies Sephira 10, Malkuth (The World). Malkuth is known as 'The Gate of the Shadow of Death' and 'The Gate of Justice'. It occupies the Sphere of Matter and its Element is Earth: so, it is the place of life and death; the place from which all life began and to which all life returns. On the Sephirothic Tree, Malkuth is furthest from the Divine Source and, through Yesod, it collects the emanations from the upper Sephiroth. Most importantly, Malkuth lies on the threshold of the Underworld and of the Averse Tree of qliphothic fragments and demonic energies. Only at Malkuth can a Cabbalist or magician invoke and control energies from the 'other side' with ease and in comparative safety, for only at Malkuth can these energies from the 'other side' be safely 'earthed'.

In 'Possession', demons from the 'other side' are named and their human Priestesses evoked. It is a poem full of spirits, mediumship, shamanic trance, prophetic speaking-in – voices, magic and mesmerism. But to balance this, there are demon-slayers, such as the Biblical Josiah, and spirit-channellers and exorcists, such as the medium Estelle Roberts⁵ and the prophetic woman in the shamanic trance.

The Virtue of Malkuth is Discrimination, especially the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal. But in 'Possession' it is clear from the first lines of the poem that this virtue is what the woman in the poem lacks. In particular, she cannot discriminate Self from the "demons" which seem to possess her.

At Malkuth, all the emanations from the Upper Tree are gathered via Yesod, where the Moon holds sway. So, 'Possession' gathers together all those dark-faced Goddesses and demonic energies which have been present in the earlier Capriccio poems. But this poem is also full of stern judgment and harsh justice wielded by Biblical and historical figures, as well, finally, as by the Priestess of the Goddess, Bastet, who is yet one more form of the dark face of the exiled Shekinah whose presence as 'Lower Mother' and 'Bride' is Cabbalistically most important at Malkuth.

'Possession', like Malkuth, also holds the energies from the earliest times of human evolution: the natural, social, spiritual and psychological history which forms "the subterranean river system" which is our common inheritance. This was the "provenance" of all the demons, gods, Biblical and historical figures named in this poem, all of whom were created and recorded by our ancestors, whose common and individual genetic inheritance we each carry in the lines on the palms of our hands. 'Possession', therefore, is a poem which is as much about human nature in general as it is about a particular individual.

Yet, the woman in the poem has a specific history and personality through which these "ancestors" are expressed. Her "dresses", the "incense" of her perfume, her "oiled smile", the "snarling" behaviour of her "schoolfriends' mothers" and her "hysterical", "spinning" state which Ted "saw plain", all identify her, "Maybe", with Assia. Throughout the poem, however, often within the space of a single line, her identity shifts and she becomes the "Princess of Thammuz", "the Babylonian / Mystery", a "hysteric", "Tabubu /

Mesmerist Priestess of Bastet". All these, as is appropriate to Malkuth, are human and worldly representatives of the Goddess.

Demonic possession, as Ted noted at the beginning of the poem, may be possible. "African / Exorcists" do, indeed, "take it for granted". And Estelle Roberts did, indeed, deal "face-to-face, with some hard cases". "Maybe" the strange, exotic allure which masked Assia's essential fragility and insecurity was a form of possession. Maybe it was something which was "never credited", only "suffered". But, as Ted asks in this poem, "who" were these demons? And "where from?". In particular, although Ted does not spell out this question, the Cabbalist, for whom nothing happens by chance, would seek the deeper, spiritual meaning for their presence and ask "What was their purpose?".

Ted tells us the answer to the first two questions, but the answer to the third can only be found (intuited perhaps, since this poem is a channel for Malkuth's magical energies) in the Cabbalistic nature of Capriccio, and in the poem's position in this particular journey. The answer to the question is also closely tied up with all the most ancient Mysteries, all of which have their roots in Malkuth.

From the Cabbalistic point of view, Malkuth is the Sephira with which we are all most familiar, since it contains all the fragmented energies of our own world. But it is also the most mysterious Sephira, since its energies are responsible for the marriage between the world-dwelling, exiled Shekinah (the feminine potencies in God "which attain their fullest expression" in Malkuth⁶ as 'Lower Mother' and 'Bride') and her Bridegroom ('The King'; the God manifest in Nature, whose god-name at Malkuth is Adonai / Adonis / Lord).

Only through this marriage and its consummation at Yesod (which is the phallic male potency and the 'Foundation' of all life⁷) can the Shekinah be redeemed from exile, the tikkun or 'harmonious correction' be achieved, and the female and male potencies in God be reunited.

In our world, the re-enactment of this sacred marriage was at the heart of the ancient Mysteries; and the magical / religious purpose of such ritual re-enactments has always been the basis of the belief in the mystical or holy nature of sexual union between a man and a woman within the limits of sacred rites and, in most religions, within marriage.

All of this is relevant to the Cabbalistic meaning of 'Possession'. But Cabbalistic ritual performed at Malkuth has three more purposes which are equally relevant to this poem and to Ted's whole Capriccio journey. To borrow from a list provided by Gershom Scholem in his informed discussion of Cabbalistic ritual⁸, these are:

1. "Redemption of the Shekinah", not only from exile in our world but also "from the 'other side'";
2. "Harmony between the rigid powers of judgment and the flowing powers of mercy";

3. "Defense against, or mastery over, the powers of the 'other side'", which, as has already been discussed, is the whole purpose of the Path of the Sword.

According to Scholem, only a perfect Zaddik (a 'righteous individual' or a person of integrity who is able to channel the Divine energies and who, in Ted's terms, is the equivalent of a shaman) can accomplish the meditation whereby he is able to "leap into the abyss of the other side" and "bring up the spirits of holiness" or light from amongst the qliphothic fragments which have fallen there⁹. Essentially, the Zaddik's journey is the same as that of a shaman. It is also the same as that of a shamanic poet practicing similar healing rituals in his poetry. But every such journey to the 'other side' for healing energies requires sacrifice: and the ritual sacrifice of Self, at the human level, parallels the mythic wounding and death of those Nature gods whose rebirth was part of the ancient Mysteries and brought renewed fertility to our world.

Sacrifice, the sexual rites and Mysteries of the sacred marriage, justice and mercy, and the confrontation and control of demons, all are part of the underlying theme of 'Possession'. To see this, one needs to look beneath the surface level of the poem, because in Cabbala, as the Zohar puts it, truth "is clothed in garments, which are the stories of this world".

In the case of 'Possession', the stories of the world to which Ted turned were the two fundamental stories which he identified in Shakespeare's work: the story of "the Great Goddess and her consort, the sacrificed god, the myth of one of the most widespread and profoundly rooted religions of the archaic world", and the story of "the Great Goddess and the Goddess-destroying god" (SGCB 2-3). Ted's own familiarity with these stories, and his awareness of their persistence from the earliest Sumerian versions right up to those of the present day, is evident in the summary of their history which he provides in the long 'Introduction' to Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being (SGCB 1-43).

The first of these mythological figures mentioned in 'Possession' is Thammuz, who was the Babylonian god of fertility, consort of Inanna / Ishtar / Astarte. His annual death was the reason for the sterility of winter, and his rebirth brought with it the renewed fertility of spring. Yet, in the earliest Sumerian myths, Inanna's own death and rebirth and her own return from the Underworld were responsible for the changing seasons. And it was her severe judgment of Thammuz's behaviour in her absence (he rejoiced) which caused her to choose him as the substitute required by her sister, Ereki-gala, as a condition of her release from the Underworld. Thammuz, therefore, became the sacrificed god, and each year Inanna returned to the Underworld to search for him and revive him. Over time, however, Thammuz came to replace the Great Goddess as the most important figure in the fertility myths, and it was at his temples that priestesses presided over rites of sacrifice and prophecy, and the sexual rituals associated with the sacred marriage and fertility.

At the same time, in Babylonian myth, another male god, Marduk, son of the Earth Goddess, Ea, stole from Inanna the Tablets of Destiny by which she held sway over all

human affairs on Earth, and he became the enforcer of law in the Babylonian pantheon.

Later, in Sumeria and Palestine, the god Baal, consort of Astarte / Anat, fulfilled the roles of both Thammuz and Marduk. And it was the temples of Baal (as Milton describe in thrilling detail in the middle of Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*¹⁰) that the Biblical Josiah, pious king of Jerusalem and worshipper of Jehovah, destroyed because “the book of law” (another form of the Tablets of Destiny) had been ignored, and idolatrous worship “unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven” had taken place, as well as sodomy and other “abominations” (II Kings: 5).

In particular, the Bible describes Josiah’s destruction of the temple on Mount Zion which was built on the site of King Solomon’s temple on the hill of Moriah. And Ted’s specific reference to the “temple of Zion” and “that cave” in ‘Possession’ seems to be a cryptic reference to both the Book of Law and to another sacrificed and resurrected God, Jesus Christ¹¹. His later reference to the “crown of thorns” also suggests this, although the Judean thorn and (in Europe) thorny holly crowns were also associated with pagan myths and mysteries.

From the Biblical account of Josiah’s actions it is not possible to know the true nature of the mysteries and magic associated with the worship of Baal, since Josiah’s severe judgment, in the name of his own god, demonized all other gods, desecrated their places of worship and slew their priests. It is apparent, however, that again the followers of a male god had usurped the power which had once belonged to the Great Goddess, and that yet another male god, Jehovah, had come to rule in her place. No wonder her anger was extreme. No wonder “The Babylonian / Mystery” demonstrated that anger by grinding “the crown of thorns” between her thighs. And by using her thighs in this way she also implied the sexual power which she yet retained. In the Goddess’s behaviour, however, and in that of her priestesses and of the usurping male gods and their priests, it is severe judgment, rather than mercy or any more balanced approach, which is apparent.

Again, in ‘Possession’, the Goddess’s anger and the dark power which she embodies are present in the spinning, spirit-possessed “hysteric” who, “Brainwashed by the Aurora Borealis” uttered “The cries of Mongolian birds” before she spoke with a prophetic voice “Which split the threshold granite / and the future”. The Moon and Star Goddesses of many countries have been associated with the strange, electrical displays of lights of the Aurora Borealis in Northern skies. In Orkney, North of Scotland, it is said that the Arctic Girl is dancing¹²; and the peoples of far North of America have similar stories. In Mongolia, as Ted clearly knew, there is a Slavic Moon Goddess, Zorya (Aurora)¹³, who is threshold guardian of the Sun God’s palace and also guards the Doomsday Hound which is chained the star constellation, Ursa Minor. At dawn, Zorya opens the gates of the palace for her husband, the Sun God, to emerge, and at dusk she closes them again. Like Inanna, Astarte and other Moon and Star Goddesses, she is associated with fertility and magic, and she is also a Goddess of War whose protection is sought by warriors with the incantation: “Unsheathe, O virgin, the sacred sword of thy father...”¹⁴.

The war-like power and anger of the Goddess is demonstrated in 'Possession' by the "arrival" of a prophetic, granite-splitting voice which issues from the mouth of the woman "spinning in the dust and smoke". And because of Malkuth's position on the threshold of the Underworld, it is the exiled, demonized dark-faced Goddess who is heard. Linked to her, in the same line, is "Tabubu", the "Mesmerist Priestess" of another ancient Moon Goddess, Bastet¹⁵, who also acts as a vehicle for the Goddess's darkest and most dangerous energies.

Tabubu's punishment of Setnau Kha-Em-Uast, who was son of an Egyptian Pharaoh, High Priest of Ptah at Memphis, a learned man and a skilful magician, was just as Ted describes it in 'Possession'. And the reason for her seduction and humiliation of Setnau, as told by Egyptologist, Wallis Budge¹⁶, was because of his theft and use (or misuse in the Goddess's terms) of the Book of Thoth, which he took from the tomb of Ptah-Nefer-Ka and his wife / sister Ahura. The God, Thoth, who was brother and 'voice' of the Egyptian Sun God, Ra, was the measurer and enumerator of Earth and the recorder and judge of the human soul. He wore the Goddess's moon (crescent and full) on his head; and his 'Book' was equivalent to the Tablets of Destiny which, in Mesopotamian myths, had first belonged to Inanna.

Once again, in the story of Tabubu and Setnau, the theft and misuse of power and authority which had originally belonged to the Goddess provoked her wrath; so, through her priestess, she extracted her revenge by using her sexual magic¹⁷.

In the earlier mythologies referred to in 'Possession', it had been male gods who usurped the Goddess's authority over human affairs. Setnau was human, but the result was the same. Each time, the Goddess's anger and jealousy resulted in the male's sacrifice, a wounding or a death and rebirth intimately connected with fertility. Each time, she used the sexual, magical and regenerative energies which always remained hers to punish the offender and to teach him a lesson. But Ted's use of these stories in 'Possession' leaves us with the question of what sort of lesson it was that Setnau had to learn, and, given the biographical nature of the Capriccio sequence, how all this related to both to Ted's relationship with Assia and to his overall purpose on the Path of the Sword.

What did Setnau learn? He learned that the mesmerizing power of the Goddess, channelled through a beautiful and seductive woman, could arouse such sexual desire in him that he was completely overwhelmed by it. He learned that under her spell, he would blindly agree to any request she made, even to the sacrifice of his wife and children. And he learned, when the spell was lifted, that he had been unable to distinguish the real from the unreal, to discriminate truth from illusion. He learned, too, not to ignore prophecies and warnings about the extreme danger of seeking to own and use knowledge which rightly belonged to the Goddess: and that whatever magic he might arrogantly think he had mastered, her magic was always stronger.

Ted, looking back at his relationship with Assia as he wrote these poems, may well have seen all these lessons as applicable to himself. In retrospect, as other poems in

the complete Birthday Letters, Howls & Whispers and Capriccio cycle show, he was able to see his own blindness and naivety, his own enthrallment, his own lack of attention to the jealous Goddess's warnings. As in 'Snow', he was "thinking of something else", and so, with the deaths of Sylvia, Assia and Shura, he was condemned and entered the period of darkness and creative sterility which was equivalent to Thammuz's incarceration in the Underworld, and to Setnau's complete abasement.

Writing to Keith Sagar on the 18th of June, 1998, just a few months before his own death, Ted said that after Sylvia's death he had suffered "three years of impasse" before beginning to write poetry again with Crow. He went on to say that in 1969, Assia's and Shura's deaths, and that of his mother, had "knocked Crow off his perch". By 1971, when he began his collaboration with Peter Brook, his own writing was "totally suspended", except for Prometheus on his Crag, which he described in an earlier letter to Sagar as "an expression of limbo – limbo in Persia, but limbo"¹⁸. Only in 1972, with the purchase of Moortown Farm and his necessary closeness to nature whilst farming there, did Ted's poetic rebirth seem to begin, as if, like his own Adam in Adam and the Sacred Nine, he had found renewed creative energy "Through the sole of a foot" pressed to the Goddess's earth.

Yet, Ted's own story of the Goddess's dethronement, exile and demonization, and of her jealous, sexual and magical revenge, does not end with 'Possession'. Nor does his account of the abasement of the human male, as represented by Setnau, complete the Capriccio sequence. Having brought us to the threshold between our world and the Underworld at Malkuth, Ted ended this poem with a colon. The sentence (literally and metaphorically) is not complete. Nor has this journey on the Path of the Sword yet ended.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The Goddess Venus, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, calls on Poseidon to recognize her claims for his support:

"Ocean, where once I grew, should own my claim,
Since formed from foam, I bear in Greek that name"

The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, English version by A.E. Watts, University of California, 1954. Book 4, lines 617-9.

2. These schoolfriends were, presumably, amongst the German soldiers who died fighting the Russians on the Steppe around Stalingrad in the Winter of 1941-2.

3. Crowley, A. 777, Weiser, Boston, MA, 1977. p. 30.

4. The Aether is an invisible, unexplained, fifth element, a kind of force-field which binds our physical world together and in which all other mysterious, unexplained energies, like gravity, magnetism and light, as well as energies associated with the spirit and the soul, function.

5. Estelle Roberts (1889-1970) was a widely respected English medium who was very influential in the Spiritualist movement. She held huge and remarkable sÃ©ances at the Royal Albert Hall in London, and in her autobiography, *Fifty Years a Medium*, she describes many public sÃ©ances and 'healings'. Occasionally she confronted spirits "face-to-face", rather than through her spirit guide, and on one such occasion she questioned, then exorcised, a spirit which had been filling a young man with an almost irresistible urge to murder his mother.

6. Scholem, G. *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, Schocken Books, NY, 1996, p. 104.

7. *Op. cit.* p. 104.

8. *Op. cit.* p. 130. The whole of chapter 4 of Scholem's book deals with Kabbalistic ritual and is very relevant to this discussion of 'Possession'.

9. *Op. cit.* p. 133. The Zaddik's ritual leap into the abyss of the 'other side' is essentially the same as the journey of the fully-fledged shaman who, in Ted's words, "can enter a trance at will and go to the spirit world... to get... ;a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs". Faas, E. *The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, USA, 1980. p. 206.

10. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton also links the various myths of sacrificed gods across the centuries. He writes of

"Thammuz...

Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured

The Syrian damsels to lament his fate

In amorous ditties all the summer's day,

While smooth Adonis from his native rock

Ran purple to the sea, supposed with blood

Of Thammuz's yearly wound".

11. There is an ancient cave on Mount Zion which holds the tombs of King David, King Solomon and other kings of the Davidic line. The Sefer Torah (the Hebrew Book of Law) is held there. It is also the reputed site of the Last Supper, which Jesus held with his disciples before his crucifixion. Ted visited the Dome of the Rock Cave when on a British Council assignment in Israel in 1971. He spoke of it in an interview as "the most sacred and important place, where rites were probably performed, a place of shamans, of visionaries". Negev, *Lover of Unreason*, Robson, USA, 2007.

12. 'Aurora' a poem by Orkney poet, George Mackay Brown, whose work Ted knew and enjoyed, begins "The Arctic girl is out tonight / (Come to the doors) / She dances..." Brown, *Selected Poems 1954-1992*, John Murray, London, 1992. P.114.

13. In some accounts, Zorya is a star goddess whose husband, Myesyats is the Moon God. Sometimes, too, she is a triple goddess. She is always associated with the night and, as the midnight star, she is responsible for the resurrection of the Sun God.

14. New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, Hamlyn, 1982. p.294.

15. The form, the yellow eyes, the association with magic, witchcraft, fertility and death, and the double nature of Bastet, the Egyptian Cat-Goddess, clearly link her with all the earlier Moon Goddesses.

16. Budge, E.W. Egyptian Magic, Dover Books, NY, 1971. P. 142-6.

17. It was Thoth who originally demanded revenge for the theft of his book by Ptah-Nefer-Ka and his sister, both of whom died because of this. But it was the Goddess's priestess who cast the spell over Setnau because, in his pride, he ignored the Goddess's warnings.

18. Ted Hughes to Keith Sagar, 26 March 1973. Both these letters are held in the British Library manuscript archive. Dep. 10003.

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'The Coat', 'Smell of Burning', 'The Pit and the Stones', 'Shibboleth', 'The Roof', 'The Error'.

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Coat

'The Coat' (C 11)

The colon which ends 'Possession' (C10) ends the first part of the sentence imposed by the Goddess on the man and woman of the Capriccio poems. This first part comprises the first ten poems of Capriccio and these constitute a complete journey on the Sephirothic Tree in the World of Assiah, which is our material, everyday world.

After the colon, the second part of the sentence comprises the final ten poems of Capriccio. These describe a second journey, this time on the Averse Tree which depends from Malkuth in the Upper World of Assiah into the Infernal Regions of the Underworld.

So, the colon links the two halves of Capriccio and two complete journeys. Figuratively, each journey forms a complete circle and these two circles are joined together, like a Mercurial figure eight, by the colon, which marks the cross-over between Malkuth at the bottom of the Upper Tree and Kether at the top of the Averse Tree. Journey is joined to

journey just as life is joined to death, light to darkness, order to chaos, and Heaven to Hell. And, since this continuous and never-ending figure eight embodies the powers of Mercury, he is thus invoked as guide and psychopomp for the poet and the reader of this whole Capriccio sequence.

Mercury's guiding presence is essential on the Averse Tree of the Underworld, where everything is reversed. The Sephiroth, there, are areas of dark, unbalanced, raw, Qliphothic energies. Vices, Illusions and Qliphoth prevail and those who enter this Underworld enter a place of dis-ease and nightmare. Yet, this is also a place where everything is broken down into its basic elements so that it may be purified and renewed. Mercury, as in Alchemy, is essential to this process: so, too, are the Sulphurous fires of Hell.

Ted, in choosing to write the Capriccio poems, chose to enter this place. He would have been aware of its dangers. Even if we discount any suggestion that he felt himself to be a skilful enough magician or shaman to attempt this journey, he was aware enough of the teachings of Jung and Freud to know the psychological perils of exploring, alone, the deepest parts of his own subconscious. But this is what he did. Only his mature powers of reason and discrimination could protect him from the uncontrolled forces of chaos, but by adopting the framework of Cabbala, and by feeling his way poem by poem along the ordered Paths of the Sephirothic Trees, he gained some stable form to help him through the darkness.

Hell

So, in 'The Coat' (C 11), the journey continues; and the sacrificed human male, who was Setanu in 'Possession' (C 10) and who is also Ted in the Capriccio sequence, enters the Underworld together with the Goddess's human priestess, Assia.

'The Coat' occupies Kether on the Averse Tree and, together with 'Smell of Burning' (C 12) at Chokmah and 'The Pit and the Stones' (C 13) at Binah, it sits in the Triple Hell (or Grave) which represents the First Palace of Hell in the Infernal Regions. Suitably, then, corpse-stench, death and horror pervade 'The Coat', as does the Qliphoth of Kether, which is Futility.

In this poem, the Goddess, as in 'Possession', exerts her sexual powers, and her human victims are powerless against her. She remains hidden, like a stalking tiger, behind the seemingly ordinary trappings of human seduction – a smoke filled bar, an exotic coat, a haunting perfume. It is "no help" that these things are "not real tiger" and present only a shadow of her true nature: the man is mauled just as surely as if he had been forced through brambles; his limbs are "watermarked", "imprinted" with the shocking odour of death, just as surely as if they had been licked by a hungry tiger. The marmot coat conceals the raw, devouring energies of lust; the beauty of the tiger's coat conceals a deadly hunger; and the Goddess's powers of enchantment hide her dark, destructive energies. "Nobody can deter" her. It was "no help" (the phrase is repeated three times) that her raw energies were concealed beneath a veneer of civilized behaviour. Such camouflage was "no good", "it made no difference". Her hunger for revenge, as in 'Possession', is "heedless as time".

TigerThe poem begins with the words “No help”, as if right from the start these humans were the Goddess’s pawns. And it is quite clear that whatever these two people thought they were doing, however beautiful their “ferny path” of dalliance, however pure the “cool, well-ironed sheets” of their bed, whatever “contract” they carefully made between them, she was behind them all the time, her “spoor” smudging their most personal and private moments.

As Hecate, ‘the old Sow who eats her farrow’, Queen of the Underworld, the Goddess bewitched her children, then ate them. Here in her Underworld, the couple lost their identity: their “signature” was smudged, their “faces” eaten, and they become part of history and myth. The unleashed powers of Hecate have always brought horror, death and destruction. Here, in ‘The Coat’, Ted likens her vengeance to that of the Old Testament God of the Hebrews who caused “the bed horror/ Of the Passover night” 1. Her judgment, like his, is merciless and severe. On the couple in this poem, she unleashed an uncontrollable, destructive force which raised “Screams that split bodies” (the phrase suggests dismemberment as well as the forcible parting of couples), left “the morning empty/ The sun itself silenced”. This curious last phrase embodies the chaos she caused: the darkness of Hell and the hollowness of the Qlipothic shells on the Averse Tree are suggested; but the paronomasia of ‘sun’ and ‘son’ also suggests that the Goddess had vanquished the male god who had usurped her throne.

Thus, at least temporarily, the old Goddess achieved her ends. But after such cataclysmic terrors the “face of aftershock” (the anthropomorphism suggests the human face as well as the (sur)face of the world) is such that “only dusty stones” – hard, barren, unfeeling, inhuman rock – “know how to wear” it.

‘Smell of Burning’ (C 12)

Capriccio

‘Smell of Burning’ occupies the Sephira of Chokmah (2) on the Averse Tree and is thus still in the Grave of the First Palace of Hell. Here, the Qlipoth is Ambivalence; and the male principal which rules this Sephira is, in this poem, Baal, The Thunderer, who is known as Tanicus in the German pantheon. His symbol is the swastika, “the sign of lightning” in the poem, and his element is Fire.

The woman in this poem, like Assia, is a daughter of this German god and, like her, Assia may have worn his swastika sign of lightning for protection during her Jewish/German childhood in Berlin. Hitler was in power at that time and he had adopted the swastika as a symbol of the Third Reich. Like the woman in the poem, too, Assia, as a child in a German school, may have been “storm-dancing in other words marching”.

Ambivalence is everywhere in the double meanings of this poem. The woman is un-named and, from the very first stanza she is both a child and a “tree in the Black Forest”. The Black Forest itself is a specific geographical location but also a dark, underworld forest and its dancing/marching, suggests both the movement of trees in a storm and the first dark movements of Hitler’s war preparations.

The dancing, the vicarious happiness, the Black Forest Giant, the totem idols and the proud childish song, all are appearances, sunny fairy-tale images which are banished by the thunder and burning with which the third stanza begins. Yet, for the rest of the poem, although ash and cinders and stone and desert surround her, the fire within this woman continues to burn.

Hints of Assia's past pervade this poem: the fear and hopelessness of her Jewish father, the homesickness of her German Protestant mother, and the escape of the family from Germany to Palestine. But the focus is on the un-named woman, "you", whose fear burns so strongly within her that it seems to leak out of her cigarette and consume her "native resins" so that she coughs "for oxygen". The native resins are what she is or was, her essential self, and the ambivalence within her is that of a displaced person – one who suppresses her German origins, as her mother does in this poem, yet burns to return to the place where she belonged and to her childhood happiness.

As always, the energies of Chokmah, which is Sephira 2, create dualities, but the final either-or question encapsulates the woman's dilemma and, if read in Cabbalistic terms, explains the most fundamental ambivalence of this poem. It suggests, once more, the identification of Assia with the Goddess/Shekinah. And it asks whether the 'you' of the poem was a female who had been displaced by history, a native accidentally burned by the fires consuming her native country: or whether she was "the victim" (the singularity of this phrase suggests her importance) – the one who was "condemned" by the unmerciful judgment of a male 'god' "to hang" forever on the burning tree, the essence of which was her own self.

This question is left unanswered and, although Chokmah lies on the Pillar of Mercy, there is no mercy in the Infernal Regions: so, a disturbing and unbalanced ambivalence prevails, and the woman continues to burn.

'The Pit and the Stones' (C 13)

This poem occupies Sephira 3, Binah, on the Averse Tree. Still in the Grave of the First Palace of Hell, this Sephira is the last Sephira above the Pit or Abyss which separates the first three Sephiroth from those of the lower part of the Tree. In the title of the poem, and in its content, the Pit is clearly present.

The poem is ruled by the Female Principle, the Mother Goddess, whose seat is Binah. It was her hands which held the man in the poem, and which "led him, tethered him" and "left him". In her motherly form, she brought him forth, nourished him, and tethered him to life, although the Pit was, like death, always present. "What prompted those hands?", he asks. He remains unanswered, unenlightened, but in 'The Mythographers' (C 3) at Binah on the Upper Tree, Ted has already answered that question: he is the Goddess's chosen one—the one she marked with her star.

"You", the woman in 'The Pit and the Stones', again embodies the Goddess as Hecate, Queen of the Underworld. She is seductive, predatory and dangerous: the Goddess of

death and darkness, whose creature is the tigress.

Behind this scenario, too, is the story of Ted, Sylvia and Assia. Ted, tethered in a troubled marriage to Sylvia, bleating for some release, was found by Assia, whose attractiveness to men was well known. Her “brimming power” and her exotic, dangerous beauty seduced him. But what began as an amusement for her became deadly serious and she fell into the Pit of darkness taking Ted with her.

In ‘The Pit and the Stones’, however, the unnamed man of the poem is still immersed in an inexplicable chain of events. Ted, too was re-living that turbulent time as he wrote this poem. Yet, his tone is rational and impersonal, as befits a Cabbalist who is following the Path of the Sword. He states facts, as he sees them, as clearly, honestly and unemotionally as possible. But he displays, through the man’s account of events, the Qlippoth of Binah, which is Fatalism, and he shapes his poem so that the man and the woman seem to have no choice. His bleats of protest, the man says, are natural - “a goat merely calls to a goat” and this is the way it has to be if life is to continue. Only as he looks back does Ted see that his bleats were, in fact, the loud screams of a creature lusting for another of its own kind, and that there was a death-note in them which attracted the predatory man-eating tiger – she of the “many trophies”.

Capriccio

At her coming his reason deserted him. He saw no sense in his tether – “made nothing” of it except as something which indicated “his own weakness”: but the ambiguity of this phrase also suggest that he negated (made nothing) its value in keeping him from the Pit. Darkness, too, was unreal: “only a sense of darkness”. And voices became just meaningless noise. In other words, he saw no danger, listened to no advice or warnings, and ignored restraints.

“So you took him”. This phrase, set in a line by itself, offset from the margin, mimics the sudden pounce of the tigress; but it states, too, the man’s helplessness and the fatal inevitability of this seizure. The inevitability of the outcome, too, is conveyed in the enjambments as the sentence continues into the next two lines. So, both predator and prey fell into the darkness of the Pit: but only she was impaled on the deadly spikes. Yet, she was not dead.

The break in the poem between the phrase “you were impaled” and the next five lines mimics the gulf on the Cabbalistic Tree which this couple had crossed. And the final five lines of the poem describe the view from the darkness of the Pit. They end the poem, but there is also a particular Cabbalistic significant to this number of lines which, here, suggests the total inversion and distortion of every aspect of the Upper Tree which takes place here in the Infernal Regions.

Demons The symbol of 5 is the pentagram, the Star of Venus/Astarte, and of Aurora, the Goddess of Dawn. But the “hatch of dawning sky” which, in ‘The Pit and the Stones’ is both the mouth of the Pit and the first dawning of sunlight, is darkened by the watchers who torment the woman as she lies impaled on spikes. The number 5 is a number of

sacrifice, but it is also the number of the Neophyte entering the Temple of Mysteries before the dawning of new understanding, and, as such, it is the number of “good in the making” (SSN 35). Here on the Averse Tree, however, the Temple is the dark Palace of Hell, and the “jubilation” of the watchers (‘jubilation’ is derived from ‘Jubilee’, a celebration of a 50 year (5 x 10) anniversary) is vindictive not joyous, cacophonous and not melodic.

The couple understand nothing and the eyes that watch them are “incomprehensible” to them both. They are tormented by the demons of Hell, and “Each” and every “stone” of the final line of the poem is a potential threat. In spite of all this, the dawn is not completely occluded, so some possibility of a good result remains.

Numerological Note:

This poem is the thirteenth poem of the Capriccio sequence. The first 13 lines also embody the Goddess’s number and describe a fateful, almost mythical situation. It is a personal story, but it also reflects a common human scenario, as did those other myth-like historical events mentioned in ‘Capriccios’, the very first poem of the whole sequence, where the magical power of the number thirteen was also invoked.

The next eight lines, (8 is Mercury’s number) suggest the tricky, dangerous, deceptive energies which prevail. But Mercury is only the messenger of the Goddess, the one who does her bidding according to his own methods, and the phrase, “So you took him”, begins three lines which, since 3 is her number, convey all her power.

The final five lines convey naivety and confusion but at their heart is the “dawning sky” and the possibility of rebirth.

‘Shibboleth’ (C 14)

Below the Grave and the Pit, deeper in the Infernal Regions, lie six more Palaces of Hell. The next three are situated at Chesed, Gevurah and Tiphereth on the Averse Tree and they are known respectively as Perdition, The Clay of Death and the Pit of Destruction.

Always, the energies of Chesed and Gevurah work together and must balance each other for the true integrity and harmony of Tiphereth to be achieved, but on the Averse Tree the Qliphoth, Vices and Illusions of these Sephiroth prevent this. So, the mercy of Chesed becomes sorrow, and the strength of Gevurah becomes cruelty and fear. The consequent imbalance between Mercy and Justice, which are the Pillars on which these Sephiroth lie, produces nothing but hollowness and self-sacrifice at Tiphereth, at the heart of the Tree.

All this is apparent in the poems which occupy these three Sephiroth in this second, Underworld, cycle of Capriccio. At Chesed (Sephira 4), in the Hell of Perdition, lies the poem ‘Shibboleth’ (C 14). At Gevurah (Sephira 5), fixed in the fearful Hell of the Clay of Death, is ‘The Roof’ (C 15). And at Tiphereth, in the Hell of the Pit of Destruction, is ‘The

Error' (C 16).

In 'Shibboleth', in the Hell of Perdition where the energies of Damnation prevail, everything has to do with judgment and condemnation. 'Shibboleth', in the Biblical Old Testament Book of Judges(12: 1-16), is a word which is used by those in power as a test of tribal origins and allegiances. Jephthah the Gilead, appointed by the Lord of Israel, decrees that the pronunciation of the word 'Shibboleth' be used by his people to distinguish those of their own tribe from the people of the tribe of Ephraim, with whom they are at war. "Four and two thousand" Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the word 'Shibboleth correctly, were slain. There is no mercy anywhere in the Book of Judges for those who do not serve the Lord; and no mercy for the people of those tribes which challenge the power of his appointed judges.

In Ted's poem, words and language are, as with the Biblical use of 'shibboleth', used as a test of tribal origins. The people who judge Assia² are those "Berkshire County", upper-class people whose allegiance is to the English Queen and to the royal House of Windsor, which (like Assia) is of German origin. Germany had only recently been at war with England, and people with foreign accents were often regarded with suspicion. Assia, however, had learned to speak with an upper-class English accent. She may well have learned her English from a mail-order course purchased by her mother from Fortnum and Mason, an English firm which was granted its first royal licence as 'Grocers to the Prince of Wales' in 1863. In the poem, however, the "royal licence" is linked to Assia's German, rather than to Fortnum and Mason. Nevertheless, the first four lines connect "Your German", "royal licence", "the English" and "Fortnum and Mason" in such a way that Assia's origins and her efforts to fit into English society are introduced as a theme beneath the surface meaning.

Assia's Hebrew, which would betray her Jewish blood was hidden, but it "survived" on the witchy diet of "bats and spiders" and lay "under [her] tongue" in a way that suggests that it lurked as a base-note to her English. It lurked, too, in a "guerrilla priest hole", so that Assia's attempts to infiltrate English society resemble guerrilla warfare, or the clandestine action of an upholder of a forbidden faith⁴.

In spite of her efforts, it seems, at some social gathering which turns from dinner party to hunt-meeting in the course of the poem, Assia's tongue betrayed her: the "dizzy silence", and the flush which darkens her cheeks, mark that moment of change. Suddenly, the Berkshire County aristocrats become unfriendly, suspicious, "English hounds". Their sneers, their "imperious noses", their glares, become those of hunting dogs who have cornered a fox. All of which threw Assia into "panic" so that her Russian border-country roots surfaced to tangle and trip her ('tangle' and 'trip' may apply to the tongue and speech as well as to entrapment) and expose her as a foreigner.

So, she was "pinioned" in "the frontier glare of customs", phrases which encompass a forced halt at some border or frontier between two ethnic groups, the judgment of officials appointed by a governing power, and, in the word 'customs', a reference to socially accepted behaviours which differ between people of different group.

The final line of this first part of the poem, “Lick of the tar-brush?”, drawled by the judging “English hounds”, is a racial insult, as well as the damnation of one who had failed the test which would allow her to be recognized as one of their own kind. However, beyond its usual insulting meaning – that the accused has black African blood in their veins and is therefore not acceptable in white society – there is an even older meaning which derives from the use of a tar-brush to distinguish the sheep of one flock from those of another⁵. It is this meaning which is most appropriate in this poem, although the racial slur damns the accusers as well as the accused.

Rejected and surrounded by her accusers, Assia saw, prophetically, her “lonely Tartar death”. Again, the suggestion of war intrudes into the poem, along with a reference to Assia’s Russian ancestry. And again, there is a suggestion that Assia was a brave warrior trying to infiltrate an enemy group.

But the belief of the judges in the supremacy of their own kind, their arrogant assumption of their right to judge others by their own standards, and their condemnation of Assia, all demonstrate the demonic inversions which are to be found on the Averse tree. It is clear that in the Infernal Regions there is no mercy and no love freely given, only the Qlippoth of Chesed, which is ‘Ideology’, the Illusion of ‘Being Right’, and the Vice of ‘Tyranny’.

There are other inversions, too. The number of Chesed is 4, the number of the Logos, the Creative Word: but in ‘Shibboleth’, words, language and pronunciation are shown to be divisive and destructive. The number 4 also represent “the Cherubim which guard the Gates of Eden with their swords of fire” (SSN 28): but the guards of ‘Shibboleth’ are snarling dogs and their Eden is their own worldly domain.

Still, Assia was the worldly representative of the Goddess who fought to regain her throne and, thus, to mend the divisions caused by severe judgment. Assia’s double role is suggested by the bats and spiders, creatures of Hecate, which lie under her tongue; and by her “Black Sea” complexion, which links her with the dark, salty element of the Goddess and with the thrice-blooming roses (combining the 3 of the Triple Goddess with her flower) which bloom there. In ‘Shibboleth’, however, the attempts of the Goddess’s chosen woman to infiltrate the ranks of those closest to the seat of power are a signal failure.

Wolf

This is made absolutely clear in the final four lines of the poem. The energies of the number 4, which should have brought change, understanding, and the dawn of enlightenment, brought to Assia only a vision of herself surrounded and “dumb like the bound/ Wolf on Tolstoy’s horse”. Significantly, the Wolf in Tolstoy’s stories is a symbol of untamed, instinctive, energies, and of the cycle of death, nurture and renewal in Nature. This is the role it plays at the end of Tolstoy’s story, Kholstomer, (the title is translated as Strider: the Story of a Horse), in which the horse (itself a creature subjugated by Man) is more rational than a wolf, and puzzles over Man’s assumption of

ownership and rights over others⁶. In an explanatory note which Ted wrote about Tolstoy's image, "the wolf, having willed itself to death (it was alive when they bound it on) is infinitely superior to the men who are standing around staring at it". Assia, he wrote, "often mentioned it and, I guess identified with it" (LTH p.698). In Ted's poem, however, Assia feels helpless, rather than superior.

So, in 'Shibboleth', the bound Wolf (the word is capitalized at the beginning of the final line of the poem) represents both Assia and the Goddess in her manifestation as the Great Mother, Nature. But the Wolf was bound and silenced: the Goddess's attempt to use her human representative to help her regain her lost power, had, at that moment, failed.

'The Roof' (C 15)

Where power is misused, where ideology and arrogance reign, and where mercy and love are absent, as they are in 'Shibboleth', there can be no security. 'The Roof', at Gevurah on the Averse tree shows the results of such imbalance.

Fear and insecurity pervade the poem, as does Gevurah's Vice of Cruelty and its Illusion of Invincibility. The roof, "any roof", becomes a symbol of protection. A roof, like other material things associated with security and comfort in this poem – the silk-line curtains, the Bach fugues, the bursting wardrobe and the talismanic fob-watch—can provide a feeling of invincibility. But the illusory nature of such protection against the horrors outside is suggested by the dark "folds" of the curtains, the wandering fugitive nature of the music, the "bursting" wardrobe and "the chain" which secures the watch which, in itself, represents our illusory belief that we can trap and control time.

Set against the horrors of this poem – the individual suffering of the "twenty million" dispossessed and murdered people – a roof seems little enough to offer all those who are "out there, under the great rain" (the paronomasia of 'rain' and 'reign' suggests the plight of the dispossessed and the power of "their murderers", and both are encompassed by "all" in line 7). But the nameless "you" in the poem feels obliged to provide it.

This person has no power, no strength (which is the energy of Gevurah), and lives "incognito", ready at any moment to be "evicted", "either" by the murdered or by their murderers. That even the murdered have such power over this person, suggests the psychological and emotional disorientation wrought by extreme fear and powerlessness, but their ghostly invincibility, too, is an illusion which the truly strong, at Gevurah, could banish.

Gevurah lies on the Pillar of Form, but in the Infernal Regions form and pattern are absent or distorted. The 'you' in the poem lives in a state of uncertainty, expecting old patterns to repeat themselves, and believing, too, that in some way she must pay for the horrors perpetrated by and experienced by others. To this end, her pattern of behaviour is that of self-sacrifice and self-negation: she remains incognito, "waiting for the knock on the door". Significantly, Gevurah (like Chesed) lies at the Door to the Temple of

Mysteries, where the awakening 'I am' of the Neophyte should occur, but the person in this poem has no identity, no gender either. We can only guess that it might be Assia⁷.

Gevurah is also the place where the Sword of Justice must be wielded against the evils of the world: passivity, here, is folly. The 'you' in 'The Roof' shows courage but not action, and her confusion is such, that she does not have the strength to claim her own identity, nor does she know who she serves or why. Her "rent" is conditionally accepted by unknown persecutors, she puts her faith in a roof and a few material things, and, bogged down in the Clay of Death in this third Palace of Hell, she suffers and waits.

Crow

'The Error' (C 16)

At the heart of the Sephirothic Tree, beyond and between the Pillars of Mercy and Justice and connected to both Chesed and Gevurah, lies Tiphereth. At Tiphereth, everything which has happened higher up the Tree, and especially at Chesed and Gevurah, is gathered on the Middle Pillar, where balance and wholeness may be obtained. Tiphereth is a place of transformation, purification, sacrifice and mystical rebirth; a place where the inner voice (or the Voice of the Holy Guardian Angel) is heard; a place where the fierce rays of the Tiphereth Sun either purify or totally consumes those who are exposed to its fires. The Virtue of Tiphereth is Dedication to the Great Work – the perfection of the human Soul. Its Vice is Pride, and its Qlippoth is Hollowness.

'The Error' lies at Tiphereth on the Averse Tree in the Fourth Palace of Hell—the Pit of Destruction. Here every aspect of Tiphereth is present, but in its most negative form.

As in 'Shibboleth' the "you" in 'The Error' is clearly Assia and the historical story of Ted's, Sylvia's and Assia's linked lives lies behind the anonymity in the poem. Again, on this Path of the Sword, Ted wields his weapon as dispassionately as possible as he envisions and tries to understand what happened. He questions and analyses, still within the framework of Cabbala. And the answers he finds are part of the broader meaning which Cabbala offers.

Assia knelt, not at an altar but at a grave – Sylvia's grave. The 'Great Work' to which she dedicated herself was that of self-incineration "in the shrine" of Sylvia's death. Her sacrifice was total: her "whole life" devoured by her "nun"-like devotion to this unholy cause. And she burned with such religious fervour, was so self-absorbed, and so convinced that to "fearlessly"⁸ incinerate herself was the right thing to do, that others, even her baby daughter and (metaphorically) "the German au-pair" were consumed by her "offered-up flames".

Why did she do this?. Why did she kneel the edge of Sylvia's grave "To be identified / Accused, incriminated"?. Why did she let others (the stone-holders who threatened her also in 'The Pit and the Stones') dement her? Their stony "proof" of their own "innocence" accused her and implied that she was guilty, and Ted's answer to these questions—that she "mis-heard a sentence"—uses the ambiguity of 'sentence' to suggest

that she accepted that accusation and that her subsequent actions were an atonement. But in the Infernal Regions everything is distorted. Whatever inner voice of conscience was guiding her (and at Tiphereth this is the voice of the Holy Guardian Angel), its sentence was garbled by the threat and accusation of the stone-holders, so that she misheard, mistranslated, and “mistook” its guidance.

She could, Ted suggests, have used her own magic (hair is traditionally believed to have strong magical powers) to fly from the grave. Even after that first incendiary sacrifice (which at Tiphereth would have been a purification), she could have doused the flames (in “a carpet”), got “to a hospital”, “Escaped” and called the whole thing “An error in translation”. Instead, she chose to compound her error by feeding herself to the tar and brimstone of Hell’s fires.

In the final lines of ‘The Error’, Ted suggests the hollowness of Assia’s belief that her patient dedication to this self-imposed martyrdom would achieve something of value. It was, he says, as if she were “feeding a child”: but there was no child. In the last four lines of the poem Ted wields his Sword with devastating, unemotional rationality, cutting to the heart of the matter. “All” Assia was doing, he states, was “being strong”, “waiting” for the fires to destroy her and for her “ashes / To be complete and cool”.

Even with the imbalance of Justice and Mercy at Chesed and Gevurah, and the chaos which consequently ensued, there was a moment of choice at Tiphereth in which things could have changed. Only Assia could make that choice, and, at the time, Ted could only “watch”. But Assia’s error combined the Illusion of Tiphereth (Identification) with its Vice (Pride). She adopted a set of behaviours (a Samurai-like belief in atonement for guilt by heroic self-sacrifice) which she mistakenly believed to be right and she did so without questioning her own judgment or considering others. Because of this error, there was no mystical rebirth, Hollowness prevailed, and no mystical child was born to fill the empty room of Tiphereth. Exposed to the Sun of Tiphereth, Assia was destroyed: only the ashes of her Self survived.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. On the night of the Passover (as it became known) the Lord slew “all the first born of the land of Egypt, both man and beast” (Exodus 1:11-12), sparing only those obedient Jews who had smeared their doorways with the sacrificial blood of a lamb.
2. The “you” in ‘Shibboleth’ is more clearly associated with Assia than in some other Capriccio poems, but by the use of this pronoun Ted not only maintains the rational, impersonal approach suited his work on the Path of the Sword, he also confirms the loss of individual identity brought about by the Goddess in ‘The Pit and the Stones’.
3. Fortnum and Mason has held many royal licences, granted not only by English royalty but also by members of foreign royal families. It has always prided itself on its ability to ship anything anywhere in the world, but it is best known for supplying caviar and champagne picnic hampers and other ‘essential’ luxuries to the elite.

4. Priest-holes were concealed hiding-places for priests constructed in the homes of English Roman Catholic families so that they might continue to celebrate Mass during the times when Roman Catholics were persecuted by law.

5. All the sheep in one flock are said to be “tarred with the same brush”.

6. Perhaps co-incidentally, Kholstomer, too, is a story about the divisions between different groups of Nature’s creatures and about the misuse of power.

7. The bursting wardrobe, the love of Bach’s music and, especially, the reference to twenty million murdered people, which suggests the Jewish Holocaust, all hint that the ‘you’ in the poem is Assia. In the context of Cabbala, however, these roofless people may well be the exiled Jewish people and the ‘you’ in the poem the exiled daughter of Israel, the Shekinah. Her dwelling place is that of the Soul of the Jewish people. And the task of the Jewish Cabbalist is to reunite the Shekinah, who is the female aspect of God, with the male aspect of God and, thus, to end her, and Israel’s, exile and restore wholeness and harmony.

8. In Ted Hughes: Collected Poems, ‘fearlessly’ has been replaced by ‘selflessly’, thus reinforcing the folly and error of such thinking.

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‘The Coat’, ‘Smell of Burning’, ‘The Pit and the Stones’, ‘Shibboleth’, ‘The Roof’, ‘The Error’.

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Coat

‘The Coat’ (C 11)

The colon which ends ‘Possession’ (C10) ends the first part of the sentence imposed by the Goddess on the man and woman of the Capriccio poems. This first part comprises the first ten poems of Capriccio and these constitute a complete journey on the Sephirothic Tree in the World of Assiah, which is our material, everyday world.

After the colon, the second part of the sentence comprises the final ten poems of Capriccio. These describe a second journey, this time on the Averse Tree which depends from Malkuth in the Upper World of Assiah into the Infernal Regions of the Underworld.

So, the colon links the two halves of Capriccio and two complete journeys. Figuratively, each journey forms a complete circle and these two circles are joined together, like a Mercurial figure eight, by the colon, which marks the cross-over between Malkuth at the bottom of the Upper Tree and Kether at the top of the Averse Tree. Journey is joined to journey just as life is joined to death, light to darkness, order to chaos, and Heaven to Hell. And, since this continuous and never-ending figure eight embodies the powers of Mercury, he is thus invoked as guide and psychopomp for the poet and the reader of this whole Capriccio sequence.

Mercury's guiding presence is essential on the Averse Tree of the Underworld, where everything is reversed. The Sephiroth, there, are areas of dark, unbalanced, raw, Qliphothic energies. Vices, Illusions and Qliphoth prevail and those who enter this Underworld enter a place of dis-ease and nightmare. Yet, this is also a place where everything is broken down into its basic elements so that it may be purified and renewed. Mercury, as in Alchemy, is essential to this process: so, too, are the Sulphurous fires of Hell.

Ted, in choosing to write the Capriccio poems, chose to enter this place. He would have been aware of its dangers. Even if we discount any suggestion that he felt himself to be a skilful enough magician or shaman to attempt this journey, he was aware enough of the teachings of Jung and Freud to know the psychological perils of exploring, alone, the deepest parts of his own subconscious. But this is what he did. Only his mature powers of reason and discrimination could protect him from the uncontrolled forces of chaos, but by adopting the framework of Cabbala, and by feeling his way poem by poem along the ordered Paths of the Sephirothic Trees, he gained some stable form to help him through the darkness.

Hell

So, in 'The Coat' (C 11), the journey continues; and the sacrificed human male, who was Setanu in 'Possession' (C 10) and who is also Ted in the Capriccio sequence, enters the Underworld together with the Goddess's human priestess, Assia.

'The Coat' occupies Kether on the Averse Tree and, together with 'Smell of Burning' (C 12) at Chokmah and 'The Pit and the Stones' (C 13) at Binah, it sits in the Triple Hell (or Grave) which represents the First Palace of Hell in the Infernal Regions. Suitably, then, corpse-stench, death and horror pervade 'The Coat', as does the Qliphoth of Kether, which is Futility.

In this poem, the Goddess, as in 'Possession', exerts her sexual powers, and her human victims are powerless against her. She remains hidden, like a stalking tiger, behind the seemingly ordinary trappings of human seduction – a smoke filled bar, an exotic coat, a haunting perfume. It is "no help" that these things are "not real tiger" and present only a shadow of her true nature: the man is mauled just as surely as if he had been forced through brambles; his limbs are "watermarked", "imprinted" with the shocking odour of death, just as surely as if they had been licked by a hungry tiger. The marmot coat conceals the raw, devouring energies of lust; the beauty of the tiger's coat

conceals a deadly hunger; and the Goddess's powers of enchantment hide her dark, destructive energies. "Nobody can deter" her. It was "no help" (the phrase is repeated three times) that her raw energies were concealed beneath a veneer of civilized behaviour. Such camouflage was "no good", "it made no difference". Her hunger for revenge, as in 'Possession', is "heedless as time".

TigerThe poem begins with the words "No help", as if right from the start these humans were the Goddess's pawns. And it is quite clear that whatever these two people thought they were doing, however beautiful their "ferny path" of dalliance, however pure the "cool, well-ironed sheets" of their bed, whatever "contract" they carefully made between them, she was behind them all the time, her "spoor" smudging their most personal and private moments.

As Hecate, 'the old Sow who eats her farrow', Queen of the Underworld, the Goddess bewitched her children, then ate them. Here in her Underworld, the couple lost their identity: their "signature" was smudged, their "faces" eaten, and they become part of history and myth. The unleashed powers of Hecate have always brought horror, death and destruction. Here, in 'The Coat', Ted likens her vengeance to that of the Old Testament God of the Hebrews who caused "the bed horror/ Of the Passover night" 1. Her judgment, like his, is merciless and severe. On the couple in this poem, she unleashed an uncontrollable, destructive force which raised "Screams that split bodies" (the phrase suggests dismemberment as well as the forcible parting of couples), left "the morning empty/ The sun itself silenced". This curious last phrase embodies the chaos she caused: the darkness of Hell and the hollowness of the Qlippothic shells on the Averse Tree are suggested; but the paronomasia of 'sun' and 'son' also suggests that the Goddess had vanquished the male god who had usurped her throne.

Thus, at least temporarily, the old Goddess achieved her ends. But after such cataclysmic terrors the "face of aftershock" (the anthropomorphism suggests the human face as well as the (sur)face of the world) is such that "only dusty stones" – hard, barren, unfeeling, inhuman rock – "know how to wear" it.

'Smell of Burning' (C 12)

Capriccio

'Smell of Burning' occupies the Sephira of Chokmah (2) on the Averse Tree and is thus still in the Grave of the First Palace of Hell. Here, the Qlippoth is Ambivalence; and the male principal which rules this Sephira is, in this poem, Baal, The Thunderer, who is known as Tanicus in the German pantheon. His symbol is the swastika, "the sign of lightning" in the poem, and his element is Fire.

The woman in this poem, like Assia, is a daughter of this German god and, like her, Assia may have worn his swastika sign of lightning for protection during her Jewish/German childhood in Berlin. Hitler was in power at that time and he had adopted the swastika as a symbol of the Third Reich. Like the woman in the poem, too, Assia, as a child in a German school, may have been "storm-dancing in other words marching".

Ambivalence is everywhere in the double meanings of this poem. The woman is un-named and, from the very first stanza she is both a child and a “tree in the Black Forest”. The Black Forest itself is a specific geographical location but also a dark, underworld forest and its dancing/marching, suggests both the movement of trees in a storm and the first dark movements of Hitler’s war preparations.

The dancing, the vicarious happiness, the Black Forest Giant, the totem idols and the proud childish song, all are appearances, sunny fairy-tale images which are banished by the thunder and burning with which the third stanza begins. Yet, for the rest of the poem, although ash and cinders and stone and desert surround her, the fire within this woman continues to burn.

Hints of Assia’s past pervade this poem: the fear and hopelessness of her Jewish father, the homesickness of her German Protestant mother, and the escape of the family from Germany to Palestine. But the focus is on the un-named woman, “you”, whose fear burns so strongly within her that it seems to leak out of her cigarette and consume her “native resins” so that she coughs “for oxygen”. The native resins are what she is or was, her essential self, and the ambivalence within her is that of a displaced person – one who suppresses her German origins, as her mother does in this poem, yet burns to return to the place where she belonged and to her childhood happiness.

As always, the energies of Chokmah, which is Sephira 2, create dualities, but the final either-or question encapsulates the woman’s dilemma and, if read in Cabbalistic terms, explains the most fundamental ambivalence of this poem. It suggests, once more, the identification of Assia with the Goddess/Shekinah. And it asks whether the ‘you’ of the poem was a female who had been displaced by history, a native accidentally burned by the fires consuming her native country: or whether she was “the victim” (the singularity of this phrase suggests her importance) – the one who was “condemned” by the unmerciful judgment of a male ‘god’ “to hang” forever on the burning tree, the essence of which was her own self.

This question is left unanswered and, although Chokmah lies on the Pillar of Mercy, there is no mercy in the Infernal Regions: so, a disturbing and unbalanced ambivalence prevails, and the woman continues to burn.

‘The Pit and the Stones’ (C 13)

This poem occupies Sephira 3, Binah, on the Averse Tree. Still in the Grave of the First Palace of Hell, this Sephira is the last Sephira above the Pit or Abyss which separates the first three Sephiroth from those of the lower part of the Tree. In the title of the poem, and in its content, the Pit is clearly present.

The poem is ruled by the Female Principle, the Mother Goddess, whose seat is Binah. It was her hands which held the man in the poem, and which “led him, tethered him” and “left him”. In her motherly form, she brought him forth, nourished him, and tethered him to life, although the Pit was, like death, always present. “What prompted those hands?”, he asks. He remains unanswered, unenlightened, but in ‘The Mythographers’ (C 3) at

Binah on the Upper Tree, Ted has already answered that question: he is the Goddess's chosen one—the one she marked with her star.

“You”, the woman in ‘The Pit and the Stones’, again embodies the Goddess as Hecate, Queen of the Underworld. She is seductive, predatory and dangerous: the Goddess of death and darkness, whose creature is the tigress.

Behind this scenario, too, is the story of Ted, Sylvia and Assia. Ted, tethered in a troubled marriage to Sylvia, bleating for some release, was found by Assia, whose attractiveness to men was well known. Her “brimming power” and her exotic, dangerous beauty seduced him. But what began as an amusement for her became deadly serious and she fell into the Pit of darkness taking Ted with her.

In ‘The Pit and the Stones’, however, the unnamed man of the poem is still immersed in an inexplicable chain of events. Ted, too was re-living that turbulent time as he wrote this poem. Yet, his tone is rational and impersonal, as befits a Cabbalist who is following the Path of the Sword. He states facts, as he sees them, as clearly, honestly and unemotionally as possible. But he displays, through the man's account of events, the Qlippoth of Binah, which is Fatalism, and he shapes his poem so that the man and the woman seem to have no choice. His bleats of protest, the man says, are natural -“a goat merely calls to a goat” and this is the way it has to be if life is to continue. Only as he looks back does Ted see that his bleats were, in fact, the loud screams of a creature lusting for another of its own kind, and that there was a death-note in them which attracted the predatory man-eating tiger – she of the “many trophies”.

Capriccio

At her coming his reason deserted him. He saw no sense in his tether – “made nothing” of it except as something which indicated “his own weakness”: but the ambiguity of this phrase also suggest that he negated (made nothing) its value in keeping him from the Pit. Darkness, too, was unreal: “only a sense of darkness”. And voices became just meaningless noise. In other words, he saw no danger, listened to no advice or warnings, and ignored restraints.

“So you took him”. This phrase, set in a line by itself, offset from the margin, mimics the sudden pounce of the tigress; but it states, too, the man's helplessness and the fatal inevitability of this seizure. The inevitability of the outcome, too, is conveyed in the enjambments as the sentence continues into the next two lines. So, both predator and prey fell into the darkness of the Pit: but only she was impaled on the deadly spikes. Yet, she was not dead.

The break in the poem between the phrase “you were impaled” and the next five lines mimics the gulf on the Cabbalistic Tree which this couple had crossed. And the final five lines of the poem describe the view from the darkness of the Pit. They end the poem, but there is also a particular Cabbalistic significant to this number of lines which, here, suggests the total inversion and distortion of every aspect of the Upper Tree which takes place here in the Infernal Regions.

DemonsThe symbol of 5 is the pentagram, the Star of Venus/Astarte, and of Aurora, the Goddess of Dawn. But the “hatch of dawning sky” which, in ‘The Pit and the Stones’ is both the mouth of the Pit and the first dawning of sunlight, is darkened by the watchers who torment the woman as she lies impaled on spikes. The number 5 is a number of sacrifice, but it is also the number of the Neophyte entering the Temple of Mysteries before the dawning of new understanding, and, as such, it is the number of “good in the making” (SSN 35). Here on the Averse Tree, however, the Temple is the dark Palace of Hell, and the “jubilation” of the watchers (‘jubilation’ is derived from ‘Jubilee’, a celebration of a 50 year (5 x 10) anniversary) is vindictive not joyous, cacophonous and not melodic.

The couple understand nothing and the eyes that watch them are “incomprehensible” to them both. They are tormented by the demons of Hell, and “Each” and every “stone” of the final line of the poem is a potential threat. In spite of all this, the dawn is not completely occluded, so some possibility of a good result remains.

Numerological Note:

This poem is the thirteenth poem of the Capriccio sequence. The first 13 lines also embody the Goddess’s number and describe a fateful, almost mythical situation. It is a personal story, but it also reflects a common human scenario, as did those other myth-like historical events mentioned in ‘Capriccios’, the very first poem of the whole sequence, where the magical power of the number thirteen was also invoked.

The next eight lines, (8 is Mercury’s number) suggest the tricky, dangerous, deceptive energies which prevail. But Mercury is only the messenger of the Goddess, the one who does her bidding according to his own methods, and the phrase, “So you took him”, begins three lines which, since 3 is her number, convey all her power.

The final five lines convey naivety and confusion but at their heart is the “dawning sky” and the possibility of rebirth.

‘Shibboleth’ (C 14)

Below the Grave and the Pit, deeper in the Infernal Regions, lie six more Palaces of Hell. The next three are situated at Chesed, Gevurah and Tiphereth on the Averse Tree and they are known respectively as Perdition, The Clay of Death and the Pit of Destruction.

Always, the energies of Chesed and Gevurah work together and must balance each other for the true integrity and harmony of Tiphereth to be achieved, but on the Averse Tree the Qliphoth, Vices and Illusions of these Sephiroth prevent this. So, the mercy of Chesed becomes sorrow, and the strength of Gevurah becomes cruelty and fear. The consequent imbalance between Mercy and Justice, which are the Pillars on which these Sephiroth lie, produces nothing but hollowness and self-sacrifice at Tiphereth, at the heart of the Tree.

All this is apparent in the poems which occupy these three Sephiroth in this second, Underworld, cycle of Capriccio. At Chesed (Sephira 4), in the Hell of Perdition, lies the poem 'Shibboleth' (C 14). At Gevurah (Sephira 5), fixed in the fearful Hell of the Clay of Death, is 'The Roof' (C 15). And at Tiphereth, in the Hell of the Pit of Destruction, is 'The Error' (C 16).

In 'Shibboleth', in the Hell of Perdition where the energies of Damnation prevail, everything has to do with judgment and condemnation. 'Shibboleth', in the Biblical Old Testament Book of Judges(12: 1-16), is a word which is used by those in power as a test of tribal origins and allegiances. Jephthah the Gilead, appointed by the Lord of Israel, decrees that the pronunciation of the word 'Shibboleth' be used by his people to distinguish those of their own tribe from the people of the tribe of Ephraim, with whom they are at war. "Four and two thousand" Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the word 'Shibboleth correctly, were slain. There is no mercy anywhere in the Book of Judges for those who do not serve the Lord; and no mercy for the people of those tribes which challenge the power of his appointed judges.

In Ted's poem, words and language are, as with the Biblical use of 'shibboleth', used as a test of tribal origins. The people who judge Assia² are those "Berkshire County", upper-class people whose allegiance is to the English Queen and to the royal House of Windsor, which (like Assia) is of German origin. Germany had only recently been at war with England, and people with foreign accents were often regarded with suspicion. Assia, however, had learned to speak with an upper-class English accent. She may well have learned her English from a mail-order course purchased by her mother from Fortnum and Mason, an English firm which was granted its first royal licence as 'Grocers to the Prince of Wales' in 18633. In the poem, however, the "royal licence" is linked to Assia's German, rather than to Fortnum and Mason. Nevertheless, the first four lines connect "Your German", "royal licence", "the English" and "Fortnum and Mason" in such a way that Assia's origins and her efforts to fit into English society are introduced as a theme beneath the surface meaning.

Assia's Hebrew, which would betray her Jewish blood was hidden, but it "survived" on the witchy diet of "bats and spiders" and lay "under [her] tongue" in a way that suggests that it lurked as a base-note to her English. It lurked, too, in a "guerrilla priest hole", so that Assia's attempts to infiltrate English society resemble guerrilla warfare, or the clandestine action of an upholder of a forbidden faith⁴.

In spite of her efforts, it seems, at some social gathering which turns from dinner party to hunt-meeting in the course of the poem, Assia's tongue betrayed her: the "dizzy silence", and the flush which darkens her cheeks, mark that moment of change. Suddenly, the Berkshire County aristocrats become unfriendly, suspicious, "English hounds". Their sneers, their "imperious noses", their glares, become those of hunting dogs who have cornered a fox. All of which threw Assia into "panic" so that her Russian border-country roots surfaced to tangle and trip her ('tangle' and 'trip' may apply to the tongue and speech as well as to entrapment) and expose her as a foreigner.

So, she was “pinioned” in “the frontier glare of customs”, phrases which encompass a forced halt at some border or frontier between two ethnic groups, the judgment of officials appointed by a governing power, and, in the word ‘customs’, a reference to socially accepted behaviours which differ between people of different group.

The final line of this first part of the poem, “Lick of the tar-brush?”, drawled by the judging “English hounds”, is a racial insult, as well as the damnation of one who had failed the test which would allow her to be recognized as one of their own kind. However, beyond its usual insulting meaning – that the accused has black African blood in their veins and is therefore not acceptable in white society – there is an even older meaning which derives from the use of a tar-brush to distinguish the sheep of one flock from those of another⁵. It is this meaning which is most appropriate in this poem, although the racial slur damns the accusers as well as the accused.

Rejected and surrounded by her accusers, Assia saw, prophetically, her “lonely Tartar death”. Again, the suggestion of war intrudes into the poem, along with a reference to Assia’s Russian ancestry. And again, there is a suggestion that Assia was a brave warrior trying to infiltrate an enemy group.

But the belief of the judges in the supremacy of their own kind, their arrogant assumption of their right to judge others by their own standards, and their condemnation of Assia, all demonstrate the demonic inversions which are to be found on the Averse tree. It is clear that in the Infernal Regions there is no mercy and no love freely given, only the Qliphoth of Chesed, which is ‘Ideology’, the Illusion of ‘Being Right’, and the Vice of ‘Tyranny’.

There are other inversions, too. The number of Chesed is 4, the number of the Logos, the Creative Word: but in ‘Shibboleth’, words, language and pronunciation are shown to be divisive and destructive. The number 4 also represent “the Cherubim which guard the Gates of Eden with their swords of fire” (SSN 28): but the guards of ‘Shibboleth’ are snarling dogs and their Eden is their own worldly domain.

Still, Assia was the worldly representative of the Goddess who fought to regain her throne and, thus, to mend the divisions caused by severe judgment. Assia’s double role is suggested by the bats and spiders, creatures of Hecate, which lie under her tongue; and by her “Black Sea” complexion, which links her with the dark, salty element of the Goddess and with the thrice-blooming roses (combining the 3 of the Triple Goddess with her flower) which bloom there. In ‘Shibboleth’, however, the attempts of the Goddess’s chosen woman to infiltrate the ranks of those closest to the seat of power are a signal failure.

Wolf

This is made absolutely clear in the final four lines of the poem. The energies of the number 4, which should have brought change, understanding, and the dawn of enlightenment, brought to Assia only a vision of herself surrounded and “dumb like the

bound/ Wolf on Tolstoy's horse". Significantly, the Wolf in Tolstoy's stories is a symbol of untamed, instinctive, energies, and of the cycle of death, nurture and renewal in Nature. This is the role it plays at the end of Tolstoy's story, *Kholstomer*, (the title is translated as *Strider: the Story of a Horse*), in which the horse (itself a creature subjugated by Man) is more rational than a wolf, and puzzles over Man's assumption of ownership and rights over others⁶. In an explanatory note which Ted wrote about Tolstoy's image, "the wolf, having willed itself to death (it was alive when they bound it on) is infinitely superior to the men who are standing around staring at it". Assia, he wrote, "often mentioned it and, I guess identified with it" (LTH p.698). In Ted's poem, however, Assia feels helpless, rather than superior.

So, in 'Shibboleth', the bound Wolf (the word is capitalized at the beginning of the final line of the poem) represents both Assia and the Goddess in her manifestation as the Great Mother, Nature. But the Wolf was bound and silenced: the Goddess's attempt to use her human representative to help her regain her lost power, had, at that moment, failed.

'The Roof' (C 15)

Where power is misused, where ideology and arrogance reign, and where mercy and love are absent, as they are in 'Shibboleth', there can be no security. 'The Roof', at Gevurah on the Averse tree shows the results of such imbalance.

Fear and insecurity pervade the poem, as does Gevurah's Vice of Cruelty and its Illusion of Invincibility. The roof, "any roof", becomes a symbol of protection. A roof, like other material things associated with security and comfort in this poem – the silk-line curtains, the Bach fugues, the bursting wardrobe and the talismanic fob-watch—can provide a feeling of invincibility. But the illusory nature of such protection against the horrors outside is suggested by the dark "folds" of the curtains, the wandering fugitive nature of the music, the "bursting" wardrobe and "the chain" which secures the watch which, in itself, represents our illusory belief that we can trap and control time.

Set against the horrors of this poem – the individual suffering of the "twenty million" dispossessed and murdered people – a roof seems little enough to offer all those who are "out there, under the great rain" (the paronomasia of 'rain' and 'reign' suggests the plight of the dispossessed and the power of "their murderers", and both are encompassed by "all" in line 7). But the nameless "you" in the poem feels obliged to provide it.

This person has no power, no strength (which is the energy of Gevurah), and lives "incognito", ready at any moment to be "evicted", "either" by the murdered or by their murderers. That even the murdered have such power over this person, suggests the psychological and emotional disorientation wrought by extreme fear and powerlessness, but their ghostly invincibility, too, is an illusion which the truly strong, at Gevurah, could banish.

Gevurah lies on the Pillar of Form, but in the Infernal Regions form and pattern are

absent or distorted. The 'you' in the poem lives in a state of uncertainty, expecting old patterns to repeat themselves, and believing, too, that in some way she must pay for the horrors perpetrated by and experienced by others. To this end, her pattern of behaviour is that of self-sacrifice and self-negation: she remains incognito, "waiting for the knock on the door". Significantly, Gevurah (like Chesed) lies at the Door to the Temple of Mysteries, where the awakening 'I am' of the Neophyte should occur, but the person in this poem has no identity, no gender either. We can only guess that it might be Assia⁷.

Gevurah is also the place where the Sword of Justice must be wielded against the evils of the world: passivity, here, is folly. The 'you' in 'The Roof' shows courage but not action, and her confusion is such, that she does not have the strength to claim her own identity, nor does she know who she serves or why. Her "rent" is conditionally accepted by unknown persecutors, she puts her faith in a roof and a few material things, and, bogged down in the Clay of Death in this third Palace of Hell, she suffers and waits.

Crow

'The Error' (C 16)

At the heart of the Sephirothic Tree, beyond and between the Pillars of Mercy and Justice and connected to both Chesed and Gevurah, lies Tiphereth. At Tiphereth, everything which has happened higher up the Tree, and especially at Chesed and Gevurah, is gathered on the Middle Pillar, where balance and wholeness may be obtained. Tiphereth is a place of transformation, purification, sacrifice and mystical rebirth; a place where the inner voice (or the Voice of the Holy Guardian Angel) is heard; a place where the fierce rays of the Tiphereth Sun either purify or totally consumes those who are exposed to its fires. The Virtue of Tiphereth is Dedication to the Great Work – the perfection of the human Soul. Its Vice is Pride, and its Qlippoth is Hollowness.

'The Error' lies at Tiphereth on the Averse Tree in the Fourth Palace of Hell—the Pit of Destruction. Here every aspect of Tiphereth is present, but in its most negative form.

As in 'Shibboleth' the "you" in 'The Error' is clearly Assia and the historical story of Ted's, Sylvia's and Assia's linked lives lies behind the anonymity in the poem. Again, on this Path of the Sword, Ted wields his weapon as dispassionately as possible as he envisions and tries to understand what happened. He questions and analyses, still within the framework of Cabbala. And the answers he finds are part of the broader meaning which Cabbala offers.

Assia knelt, not at an altar but at a grave – Sylvia's grave. The 'Great Work' to which she dedicated herself was that of self-incineration "in the shrine" of Sylvia's death. Her sacrifice was total: her "whole life" devoured by her "nun"-like devotion to this unholy cause. And she burned with such religious fervour, was so self-absorbed, and so convinced that to "fearlessly"⁸ incinerate herself was the right thing to do, that others, even her baby daughter and (metaphorically) "the German au-pair" were consumed by her "offered-up flames".

Why did she do this?. Why did she kneel the edge of Sylvia's grave "To be identified / Accused, incriminated"? Why did she let others (the stone-holders who threatened her also in 'The Pit and the Stones') dement her? Their stony "proof" of their own "innocence" accused her and implied that she was guilty, and Ted's answer to these questions—that she "mis-heard a sentence"—uses the ambiguity of 'sentence' to suggest that she accepted that accusation and that her subsequent actions were an atonement. But in the Infernal Regions everything is distorted. Whatever inner voice of conscience was guiding her (and at Tiphereth this is the voice of the Holy Guardian Angel), its sentence was garbled by the threat and accusation of the stone-holders, so that she misheard, mistranslated, and "mistook" its guidance.

She could, Ted suggests, have used her own magic (hair is traditionally believed to have strong magical powers) to fly from the grave. Even after that first incendiary sacrifice (which at Tiphereth would have been a purification), she could have doused the flames (in "a carpet"), got "to a hospital", "Escaped" and called the whole thing "An error in translation". Instead, she chose to compound her error by feeding herself to the tar and brimstone of Hell's fires.

In the final lines of 'The Error', Ted suggests the hollowness of Assia's belief that her patient dedication to this self-imposed martyrdom would achieve something of value. It was, he says, as if she were "feeding a child": but there was no child. In the last four lines of the poem Ted wields his Sword with devastating, unemotional rationality, cutting to the heart of the matter. "All" Assia was doing, he states, was "being strong", "waiting" for the fires to destroy her and for her "ashes / To be complete and cool".

Even with the imbalance of Justice and Mercy at Chesed and Gevurah, and the chaos which consequently ensued, there was a moment of choice at Tiphereth in which things could have changed. Only Assia could make that choice, and, at the time, Ted could only "watch". But Assia's error combined the Illusion of Tiphereth (Identification) with its Vice (Pride). She adopted a set of behaviours (a Samurai-like belief in atonement for guilt by heroic self-sacrifice) which she mistakenly believed to be right and she did so without questioning her own judgment or considering others. Because of this error, there was no mystical rebirth, Hollowness prevailed, and no mystical child was born to fill the empty room of Tiphereth. Exposed to the Sun of Tiphereth, Assia was destroyed: only the ashes of her Self survived.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. On the night of the Passover (as it became known) the Lord slew "all the first born of the land of Egypt, both man and beast" (Exodus 1:11-12), sparing only those obedient Jews who had smeared their doorways with the sacrificial blood of a lamb.
2. The "you" in 'Shibboleth' is more clearly associated with Assia than in some other Capriccio poems, but by the use of this pronoun Ted not only maintains the rational, impersonal approach suited his work on the Path of the Sword, he also confirms the loss of individual identity brought about by the Goddess in 'The Pit and the Stones'.

3. Fortnum and Mason has held many royal licences, granted not only by English royalty but also by members of foreign royal families. It has always prided itself on its ability to ship anything anywhere in the world, but it is best known for supplying caviar and champagne picnic hampers and other 'essential' luxuries to the elite.

4. Priest-holes were concealed hiding-places for priests constructed in the homes of English Roman Catholic families so that they might continue to celebrate Mass during the times when Roman Catholics were persecuted by law.

5. All the sheep in one flock are said to be "tarred with the same brush".

6. Perhaps co-incidentally, Kholstomer, too, is a story about the divisions between different groups of Nature's creatures and about the misuse of power.

7. The bursting wardrobe, the love of Bach's music and, especially, the reference to twenty million murdered people, which suggests the Jewish Holocaust, all hint that the 'you' in the poem is Assia. In the context of Cabbala, however, these roofless people may well be the exiled Jewish people and the 'you' in the poem the exiled daughter of Israel, the Shekinah. Her dwelling place is that of the Soul of the Jewish people. And the task of the Jewish Cabbalist is to reunite the Shekinah, who is the female aspect of God, with the male aspect of God and, thus, to end her, and Israel's, exile and restore wholeness and harmony.

8. In Ted Hughes: Collected Poems, 'fearlessly' has been replaced by 'selflessly', thus reinforcing the folly and error of such thinking.

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'The Coat', 'Smell of Burning', 'The Pit and the Stones', 'Shibboleth', 'The Roof', 'The Error'.

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Coat

'The Coat' (C 11)

The colon which ends 'Possession' (C10) ends the first part of the sentence imposed by the Goddess on the man and woman of the Capriccio poems. This first part comprises the first ten poems of Capriccio and these constitute a complete journey on the Sephirothic Tree in the World of Assiah, which is our material, everyday world.

After the colon, the second part of the sentence comprises the final ten poems of Capriccio. These describe a second journey, this time on the Averse Tree which depends from Malkuth in the Upper World of Assiah into the Infernal Regions of the Underworld.

So, the colon links the two halves of Capriccio and two complete journeys. Figuratively, each journey forms a complete circle and these two circles are joined together, like a Mercurial figure eight, by the colon, which marks the cross-over between Malkuth at the bottom of the Upper Tree and Kether at the top of the Averse Tree. Journey is joined to journey just as life is joined to death, light to darkness, order to chaos, and Heaven to Hell. And, since this continuous and never-ending figure eight embodies the powers of Mercury, he is thus invoked as guide and psychopomp for the poet and the reader of this whole Capriccio sequence.

Mercury's guiding presence is essential on the Averse Tree of the Underworld, where everything is reversed. The Sephiroth, there, are areas of dark, unbalanced, raw, Qlippothic energies. Vices, Illusions and Qlippoth prevail and those who enter this Underworld enter a place of dis-ease and nightmare. Yet, this is also a place where everything is broken down into its basic elements so that it may be purified and renewed. Mercury, as in Alchemy, is essential to this process: so, too, are the Sulphurous fires of Hell.

Ted, in choosing to write the Capriccio poems, chose to enter this place. He would have been aware of its dangers. Even if we discount any suggestion that he felt himself to be a skilful enough magician or shaman to attempt this journey, he was aware enough of the teachings of Jung and Freud to know the psychological perils of exploring, alone, the deepest parts of his own subconscious. But this is what he did. Only his mature powers of reason and discrimination could protect him from the uncontrolled forces of chaos, but by adopting the framework of Cabbala, and by feeling his way poem by poem along the ordered Paths of the Sephirothic Trees, he gained some stable form to help him through the darkness.

Hell

So, in 'The Coat' (C 11), the journey continues; and the sacrificed human male, who was Setanu in 'Possession' (C 10) and who is also Ted in the Capriccio sequence, enters the Underworld together with the Goddess's human priestess, Assia.

'The Coat' occupies Kether on the Averse Tree and, together with 'Smell of Burning' (C 12) at Chokmah and 'The Pit and the Stones' (C 13) at Binah, it sits in the Triple Hell (or Grave) which represents the First Palace of Hell in the Infernal Regions. Suitably, then, corpse-stench, death and horror pervade 'The Coat', as does the Qlippoth of Kether, which is Futility.

In this poem, the Goddess, as in 'Possession', exerts her sexual powers, and her human victims are powerless against her. She remains hidden, like a stalking tiger, behind the seemingly ordinary trappings of human seduction – a smoke filled bar, an

exotic coat, a haunting perfume. It is “no help” that these things are “not real tiger” and present only a shadow of her true nature: the man is mauled just as surely as if he had been forced through brambles; his limbs are “watermarked”, “imprinted” with the shocking odour of death, just as surely as if they had been licked by a hungry tiger. The marmot coat conceals the raw, devouring energies of lust; the beauty of the tiger’s coat conceals a deadly hunger; and the Goddess’s powers of enchantment hide her dark, destructive energies. “Nobody can deter” her. It was “no help” (the phrase is repeated three times) that her raw energies were concealed beneath a veneer of civilized behaviour. Such camouflage was “no good”, “it made no difference”. Her hunger for revenge, as in ‘Possession’, is “heedless as time”.

Tiger The poem begins with the words “No help”, as if right from the start these humans were the Goddess’s pawns. And it is quite clear that whatever these two people thought they were doing, however beautiful their “ferny path” of dalliance, however pure the “cool, well-ironed sheets” of their bed, whatever “contract” they carefully made between them, she was behind them all the time, her “spoor” smudging their most personal and private moments.

As Hecate, ‘the old Sow who eats her farrow’, Queen of the Underworld, the Goddess bewitched her children, then ate them. Here in her Underworld, the couple lost their identity: their “signature” was smudged, their “faces” eaten, and they become part of history and myth. The unleashed powers of Hecate have always brought horror, death and destruction. Here, in ‘The Coat’, Ted likens her vengeance to that of the Old Testament God of the Hebrews who caused “the bed horror/ Of the Passover night” 1. Her judgment, like his, is merciless and severe. On the couple in this poem, she unleashed an uncontrollable, destructive force which raised “Screams that split bodies” (the phrase suggests dismemberment as well as the forcible parting of couples), left “the morning empty/ The sun itself silenced”. This curious last phrase embodies the chaos she caused: the darkness of Hell and the hollowness of the Qliphothic shells on the Averse Tree are suggested; but the paronomasia of ‘sun’ and ‘son’ also suggests that the Goddess had vanquished the male god who had usurped her throne.

Thus, at least temporarily, the old Goddess achieved her ends. But after such cataclysmic terrors the “face of aftershock” (the anthropomorphism suggests the human face as well as the (sur)face of the world) is such that “only dusty stones” – hard, barren, unfeeling, inhuman rock – “know how to wear” it.

‘Smell of Burning’ (C 12)

Capriccio

‘Smell of Burning’ occupies the Sephira of Chokmah (2) on the Averse Tree and is thus still in the Grave of the First Palace of Hell. Here, the Qliphoth is Ambivalence; and the male principal which rules this Sephira is, in this poem, Baal, The Thunderer, who is known as Tanicus in the German pantheon. His symbol is the swastika, “the sign of lightning” in the poem, and his element is Fire.

The woman in this poem, like Assia, is a daughter of this German god and, like her,

Assia may have worn his swastika sign of lightning for protection during her Jewish/German childhood in Berlin. Hitler was in power at that time and he had adopted the swastika as a symbol of the Third Reich. Like the woman in the poem, too, Assia, as a child in a German school, may have been “storm-dancing in other words marching”.

Ambivalence is everywhere in the double meanings of this poem. The woman is un-named and, from the very first stanza she is both a child and a “tree in the Black Forest”. The Black Forest itself is a specific geographical location but also a dark, underworld forest and its dancing/marching, suggests both the movement of trees in a storm and the first dark movements of Hitler’s war preparations.

The dancing, the vicarious happiness, the Black Forest Giant, the totem idols and the proud childish song, all are appearances, sunny fairy-tale images which are banished by the thunder and burning with which the third stanza begins. Yet, for the rest of the poem, although ash and cinders and stone and desert surround her, the fire within this woman continues to burn.

Hints of Assia’s past pervade this poem: the fear and hopelessness of her Jewish father, the homesickness of her German Protestant mother, and the escape of the family from Germany to Palestine. But the focus is on the un-named woman, “you”, whose fear burns so strongly within her that it seems to leak out of her cigarette and consume her “native resins” so that she coughs “for oxygen”. The native resins are what she is or was, her essential self, and the ambivalence within her is that of a displaced person – one who suppresses her German origins, as her mother does in this poem, yet burns to return to the place where she belonged and to her childhood happiness.

As always, the energies of Chokmah, which is Sephira 2, create dualities, but the final either-or question encapsulates the woman’s dilemma and, if read in Cabbalistic terms, explains the most fundamental ambivalence of this poem. It suggests, once more, the identification of Assia with the Goddess/Shekinah. And it asks whether the ‘you’ of the poem was a female who had been displaced by history, a native accidentally burned by the fires consuming her native country: or whether she was “the victim” (the singularity of this phrase suggests her importance) – the one who was “condemned” by the unmerciful judgment of a male ‘god’ “to hang” forever on the burning tree, the essence of which was her own self.

This question is left unanswered and, although Chokmah lies on the Pillar of Mercy, there is no mercy in the Infernal Regions: so, a disturbing and unbalanced ambivalence prevails, and the woman continues to burn.

‘The Pit and the Stones’ (C 13)

This poem occupies Sephira 3, Binah, on the Averse Tree. Still in the Grave of the First Palace of Hell, this Sephira is the last Sephira above the Pit or Abyss which separates the first three Sephiroth from those of the lower part of the Tree. In the title of the poem, and in its content, the Pit is clearly present.

The poem is ruled by the Female Principle, the Mother Goddess, whose seat is Binah. It was her hands which held the man in the poem, and which “led him, tethered him” and “left him”. In her motherly form, she brought him forth, nourished him, and tethered him to life, although the Pit was, like death, always present. “What prompted those hands?”, he asks. He remains unanswered, unenlightened, but in ‘The Mythographers’ (C 3) at Binah on the Upper Tree, Ted has already answered that question: he is the Goddess’s chosen one—the one she marked with her star.

“You”, the woman in ‘The Pit and the Stones’, again embodies the Goddess as Hecate, Queen of the Underworld. She is seductive, predatory and dangerous: the Goddess of death and darkness, whose creature is the tigress.

Behind this scenario, too, is the story of Ted, Sylvia and Assia. Ted, tethered in a troubled marriage to Sylvia, bleating for some release, was found by Assia, whose attractiveness to men was well known. Her “brimming power” and her exotic, dangerous beauty seduced him. But what began as an amusement for her became deadly serious and she fell into the Pit of darkness taking Ted with her.

In ‘The Pit and the Stones’, however, the unnamed man of the poem is still immersed in an inexplicable chain of events. Ted, too was re-living that turbulent time as he wrote this poem. Yet, his tone is rational and impersonal, as befits a Cabbalist who is following the Path of the Sword. He states facts, as he sees them, as clearly, honestly and unemotionally as possible. But he displays, through the man’s account of events, the Qlippoth of Binah, which is Fatalism, and he shapes his poem so that the man and the woman seem to have no choice. His bleats of protest, the man says, are natural -“a goat merely calls to a goat” and this is the way it has to be if life is to continue. Only as he looks back does Ted see that his bleats were, in fact, the loud screams of a creature lusting for another of its own kind, and that there was a death-note in them which attracted the predatory man-eating tiger – she of the “many trophies”.

Capriccio

At her coming his reason deserted him. He saw no sense in his tether – “made nothing” of it except as something which indicated “his own weakness”: but the ambiguity of this phrase also suggest that he negated (made nothing) its value in keeping him from the Pit. Darkness, too, was unreal: “only a sense of darkness”. And voices became just meaningless noise. In other words, he saw no danger, listened to no advice or warnings, and ignored restraints.

“So you took him”. This phrase, set in a line by itself, offset from the margin, mimics the sudden pounce of the tigress; but it states, too, the man’s helplessness and the fatal inevitability of this seizure. The inevitability of the outcome, too, is conveyed in the enjambments as the sentence continues into the next two lines. So, both predator and prey fell into the darkness of the Pit: but only she was impaled on the deadly spikes. Yet, she was not dead.

The break in the poem between the phrase “you were impaled” and the next five lines

mimics the gulf on the Cabbalistic Tree which this couple had crossed. And the final five lines of the poem describe the view from the darkness of the Pit. They end the poem, but there is also a particular Cabbalistic significant to this number of lines which, here, suggests the total inversion and distortion of every aspect of the Upper Tree which takes place here in the Infernal Regions.

DemonsThe symbol of 5 is the pentagram, the Star of Venus/Astarte, and of Aurora, the Goddess of Dawn. But the “hatch of dawning sky” which, in ‘The Pit and the Stones’ is both the mouth of the Pit and the first dawning of sunlight, is darkened by the watchers who torment the woman as she lies impaled on spikes. The number 5 is a number of sacrifice, but it is also the number of the Neophyte entering the Temple of Mysteries before the dawning of new understanding, and, as such, it is the number of “good in the making” (SSN 35). Here on the Averse Tree, however, the Temple is the dark Palace of Hell, and the “jubilation” of the watchers (‘jubilation’ is derived from ‘Jubilee’, a celebration of a 50 year (5 x 10) anniversary) is vindictive not joyous, cacophonous and not melodic.

The couple understand nothing and the eyes that watch them are “incomprehensible” to them both. They are tormented by the demons of Hell, and “Each” and every “stone” of the final line of the poem is a potential threat. In spite of all this, the dawn is not completely occluded, so some possibility of a good result remains.

Numerological Note:

This poem is the thirteenth poem of the Capriccio sequence. The first 13 lines also embody the Goddess’s number and describe a fateful, almost mythical situation. It is a personal story, but it also reflects a common human scenario, as did those other myth-like historical events mentioned in ‘Capriccios’, the very first poem of the whole sequence, where the magical power of the number thirteen was also invoked.

The next eight lines, (8 is Mercury’s number) suggest the tricky, dangerous, deceptive energies which prevail. But Mercury is only the messenger of the Goddess, the one who does her bidding according to his own methods, and the phrase, “So you took him”, begins three lines which, since 3 is her number, convey all her power.

The final five lines convey naivety and confusion but at their heart is the “dawning sky” and the possibility of rebirth.

‘Shibboleth’ (C 14)

Below the Grave and the Pit, deeper in the Infernal Regions, lie six more Palaces of Hell. The next three are situated at Chesed, Gevurah and Tiphereth on the Averse Tree and they are known respectively as Perdition, The Clay of Death and the Pit of Destruction.

Always, the energies of Chesed and Gevurah work together and must balance each other for the true integrity and harmony of Tiphereth to be achieved, but on the Averse

Tree the Qlipboth, Vices and Illusions of these Sephiroth prevent this. So, the mercy of Chesed becomes sorrow, and the strength of Gevurah becomes cruelty and fear. The consequent imbalance between Mercy and Justice, which are the Pillars on which these Sephiroth lie, produces nothing but hollowness and self-sacrifice at Tiphereth, at the heart of the Tree.

All this is apparent in the poems which occupy these three Sephiroth in this second, Underworld, cycle of Capriccio. At Chesed (Sephira 4), in the Hell of Perdition, lies the poem 'Shibboleth' (C 14). At Gevurah (Sephira 5), fixed in the fearful Hell of the Clay of Death, is 'The Roof' (C 15). And at Tiphereth, in the Hell of the Pit of Destruction, is 'The Error' (C 16).

In 'Shibboleth', in the Hell of Perdition where the energies of Damnation prevail, everything has to do with judgment and condemnation. 'Shibboleth', in the Biblical Old Testament Book of Judges(12: 1-16), is a word which is used by those in power as a test of tribal origins and allegiances. Jephthah the Gilead, appointed by the Lord of Israel, decrees that the pronunciation of the word 'Shibboleth' be used by his people to distinguish those of their own tribe from the people of the tribe of Ephraim, with whom they are at war. "Four and two thousand" Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the word 'Shibboleth correctly, were slain. There is no mercy anywhere in the Book of Judges for those who do not serve the Lord; and no mercy for the people of those tribes which challenge the power of his appointed judges.

In Ted's poem, words and language are, as with the Biblical use of 'shibboleth', used as a test of tribal origins. The people who judge Assia² are those "Berkshire County", upper-class people whose allegiance is to the English Queen and to the royal House of Windsor, which (like Assia) is of German origin. Germany had only recently been at war with England, and people with foreign accents were often regarded with suspicion. Assia, however, had learned to speak with an upper-class English accent. She may well have learned her English from a mail-order course purchased by her mother from Fortnum and Mason, an English firm which was granted its first royal licence as 'Grocers to the Prince of Wales' in 18633. In the poem, however, the "royal licence" is linked to Assia's German, rather than to Fortnum and Mason. Nevertheless, the first four lines connect "Your German", "royal licence", "the English" and "Fortnum and Mason" in such a way that Assia's origins and her efforts to fit into English society are introduced as a theme beneath the surface meaning.

Assia's Hebrew, which would betray her Jewish blood was hidden, but it "survived" on the witchy diet of "bats and spiders" and lay "under [her] tongue" in a way that suggests that it lurked as a base-note to her English. It lurked, too, in a "guerrilla priest hole", so that Assia's attempts to infiltrate English society resemble guerrilla warfare, or the clandestine action of an upholder of a forbidden faith⁴.

In spite of her efforts, it seems, at some social gathering which turns from dinner party to hunt-meeting in the course of the poem, Assia's tongue betrayed her: the "dizzy silence", and the flush which darkens her cheeks, mark that moment of change.

Suddenly, the Berkshire County aristocrats become unfriendly, suspicious, “English hounds”. Their sneers, their “imperious noses”, their glares, become those of hunting dogs who have cornered a fox. All of which threw Assia into “panic” so that her Russian border-country roots surfaced to tangle and trip her (‘tangle’ and ‘trip’ may apply to the tongue and speech as well as to entrapment) and expose her as a foreigner.

So, she was “pinioned” in “the frontier glare of customs”, phrases which encompass a forced halt at some border or frontier between two ethnic groups, the judgment of officials appointed by a governing power, and, in the word ‘customs’, a reference to socially accepted behaviours which differ between people of different group.

The final line of this first part of the poem, “Lick of the tar-brush?”, drawled by the judging “English hounds”, is a racial insult, as well as the damnation of one who had failed the test which would allow her to be recognized as one of their own kind. However, beyond its usual insulting meaning – that the accused has black African blood in their veins and is therefore not acceptable in white society – there is an even older meaning which derives from the use of a tar-brush to distinguish the sheep of one flock from those of another⁵. It is this meaning which is most appropriate in this poem, although the racial slur damns the accusers as well as the accused.

Rejected and surrounded by her accusers, Assia saw, prophetically, her “lonely Tartar death”. Again, the suggestion of war intrudes into the poem, along with a reference to Assia’s Russian ancestry. And again, there is a suggestion that Assia was a brave warrior trying to infiltrate an enemy group.

But the belief of the judges in the supremacy of their own kind, their arrogant assumption of their right to judge others by their own standards, and their condemnation of Assia, all demonstrate the demonic inversions which are to be found on the Averse tree. It is clear that in the Infernal Regions there is no mercy and no love freely given, only the Qliphoth of Chesed, which is ‘Ideology’, the Illusion of ‘Being Right’, and the Vice of ‘Tyranny’.

There are other inversions, too. The number of Chesed is 4, the number of the Logos, the Creative Word: but in ‘Shibboleth’, words, language and pronunciation are shown to be divisive and destructive. The number 4 also represent “the Cherubim which guard the Gates of Eden with their swords of fire” (SSN 28): but the guards of ‘Shibboleth’ are snarling dogs and their Eden is their own worldly domain.

Still, Assia was the worldly representative of the Goddess who fought to regain her throne and, thus, to mend the divisions caused by severe judgment. Assia’s double role is suggested by the bats and spiders, creatures of Hecate, which lie under her tongue; and by her “Black Sea” complexion, which links her with the dark, salty element of the Goddess and with the thrice-blooming roses (combining the 3 of the Triple Goddess with her flower) which bloom there. In ‘Shibboleth’, however, the attempts of the Goddess’s chosen woman to infiltrate the ranks of those closest to the seat of power are a signal failure.

Wolf

This is made absolutely clear in the final four lines of the poem. The energies of the number 4, which should have brought change, understanding, and the dawn of enlightenment, brought to Assia only a vision of herself surrounded and “dumb like the bound/ Wolf on Tolstoy’s horse”. Significantly, the Wolf in Tolstoy’s stories is a symbol of untamed, instinctive, energies, and of the cycle of death, nurture and renewal in Nature. This is the role it plays at the end of Tolstoy’s story, *Kholstomer*, (the title is translated as *Strider: the Story of a Horse*), in which the horse (itself a creature subjugated by Man) is more rational than a wolf, and puzzles over Man’s assumption of ownership and rights over others⁶. In an explanatory note which Ted wrote about Tolstoy’s image, “the wolf, having willed itself to death (it was alive when they bound it on) is infinitely superior to the men who are standing around staring at it”. Assia, he wrote, “often mentioned it and, I guess identified with it” (LTH p.698). In Ted’s poem, however, Assia feels helpless, rather than superior.

So, in ‘Shibboleth’, the bound Wolf (the word is capitalized at the beginning of the final line of the poem) represents both Assia and the Goddess in her manifestation as the Great Mother, Nature. But the Wolf was bound and silenced: the Goddess’s attempt to use her human representative to help her regain her lost power, had, at that moment, failed.

‘The Roof’ (C 15)

Where power is misused, where ideology and arrogance reign, and where mercy and love are absent, as they are in ‘Shibboleth’, there can be no security. ‘The Roof’, at Gevurah on the Averse tree shows the results of such imbalance.

Fear and insecurity pervade the poem, as does Gevurah’s Vice of Cruelty and its Illusion of Invincibility. The roof, “any roof”, becomes a symbol of protection. A roof, like other material things associated with security and comfort in this poem – the silk-line curtains, the Bach fugues, the bursting wardrobe and the talismanic fob-watch—can provide a feeling of invincibility. But the illusory nature of such protection against the horrors outside is suggested by the dark “folds” of the curtains, the wandering fugitive nature of the music, the “bursting” wardrobe and “the chain” which secures the watch which, in itself, represents our illusory belief that we can trap and control time.

Set against the horrors of this poem – the individual suffering of the “twenty million” dispossessed and murdered people – a roof seems little enough to offer all those who are “out there, under the great rain” (the paronomasia of ‘rain’ and ‘reign’ suggests the plight of the dispossessed and the power of “their murderers”, and both are encompassed by “all” in line 7). But the nameless “you” in the poem feels obliged to provide it.

This person has no power, no strength (which is the energy of Gevurah), and lives “incognito”, ready at any moment to be “evicted”, “either” by the murdered or by their murderers. That even the murdered have such power over this person, suggests the

psychological and emotional disorientation wrought by extreme fear and powerlessness, but their ghostly invincibility, too, is an illusion which the truly strong, at Gevurah, could banish.

Gevurah lies on the Pillar of Form, but in the Infernal Regions form and pattern are absent or distorted. The 'you' in the poem lives in a state of uncertainty, expecting old patterns to repeat themselves, and believing, too, that in some way she must pay for the horrors perpetrated by and experienced by others. To this end, her pattern of behaviour is that of self-sacrifice and self-negation: she remains incognito, "waiting for the knock on the door". Significantly, Gevurah (like Chesed) lies at the Door to the Temple of Mysteries, where the awakening 'I am' of the Neophyte should occur, but the person in this poem has no identity, no gender either. We can only guess that it might be Assia⁷.

Gevurah is also the place where the Sword of Justice must be wielded against the evils of the world: passivity, here, is folly. The 'you' in 'The Roof' shows courage but not action, and her confusion is such, that she does not have the strength to claim her own identity, nor does she know who she serves or why. Her "rent" is conditionally accepted by unknown persecutors, she puts her faith in a roof and a few material things, and, bogged down in the Clay of Death in this third Palace of Hell, she suffers and waits.

Crow

'The Error' (C 16)

At the heart of the Sephirothic Tree, beyond and between the Pillars of Mercy and Justice and connected to both Chesed and Gevurah, lies Tiphereth. At Tiphereth, everything which has happened higher up the Tree, and especially at Chesed and Gevurah, is gathered on the Middle Pillar, where balance and wholeness may be obtained. Tiphereth is a place of transformation, purification, sacrifice and mystical rebirth; a place where the inner voice (or the Voice of the Holy Guardian Angel) is heard; a place where the fierce rays of the Tiphereth Sun either purify or totally consumes those who are exposed to its fires. The Virtue of Tiphereth is Dedication to the Great Work – the perfection of the human Soul. Its Vice is Pride, and its Qlippoth is Hollowness.

'The Error' lies at Tiphereth on the Averse Tree in the Fourth Palace of Hell—the Pit of Destruction. Here every aspect of Tiphereth is present, but in its most negative form.

As in 'Shibboleth' the "you" in 'The Error' is clearly Assia and the historical story of Ted's, Sylvia's and Assia's linked lives lies behind the anonymity in the poem. Again, on this Path of the Sword, Ted wields his weapon as dispassionately as possible as he envisions and tries to understand what happened. He questions and analyses, still within the framework of Cabbala. And the answers he finds are part of the broader meaning which Cabbala offers.

Assia knelt, not at an altar but at a grave – Sylvia's grave. The 'Great Work' to which she dedicated herself was that of self-incineration "in the shrine" of Sylvia's death. Her sacrifice was total: her "whole life" devoured by her "nun"-like devotion to this unholy

cause. And she burned with such religious fervour, was so self-absorbed, and so convinced that to “fearlessly”⁸ incinerate herself was the right thing to do, that others, even her baby daughter and (metaphorically) “the German au-pair” were consumed by her “offered–up flames”.

Why did she do this?. Why did she kneel the edge of Sylvia’s grave “To be identified / Accused, incriminated”?. Why did she let others (the stone-holders who threatened her also in ‘The Pit and the Stones’) dement her? Their stony “proof” of their own “innocence” accused her and implied that she was guilty, and Ted’s answer to these questions—that she “mis-heard a sentence”—uses the ambiguity of ‘sentence’ to suggest that she accepted that accusation and that her subsequent actions were an atonement. But in the Infernal Regions everything is distorted. Whatever inner voice of conscience was guiding her (and at Tiphereth this is the voice of the Holy Guardian Angel), its sentence was garbled by the threat and accusation of the stone-holders, so that she misheard , mistranslated, and “mistook” its guidance.

She could, Ted suggests, have used her own magic (hair is traditionally believed to have strong magical powers) to fly from the grave. Even after that first incendiary sacrifice (which at Tiphereth would have been a purification), she could have doused the flames (in “a carpet”), got “to a hospital”, “Escaped” and called the whole thing “An error in translation”. Instead, she chose to compound her error by feeding herself to the tar and brimstone of Hell’s fires.

In the final lines of ‘The Error’, Ted suggests the hollowness of Assia’s belief that her patient dedication to this self-imposed martyrdom would achieve something of value. It was, he says, as if she were “feeding a child”: but there was no child. In the last four lines of the poem Ted wields his Sword with devastating, unemotional rationality, cutting to the heart of the matter. “All” Assia was doing, he states, was “being strong”, “waiting” for the fires to destroy her and for her “ashes / To be complete and cool”.

Even with the imbalance of Justice and Mercy at Chesed and Gevurah, and the chaos which consequently ensued, there was a moment of choice at Tiphereth in which things could have changed. Only Assia could make that choice, and, at the time, Ted could only “watch”. But Assia’s error combined the Illusion of Tiphereth (Identification) with its Vice (Pride). She adopted a set of behaviours (a Samurai-like belief in atonement for guilt by heroic self-sacrifice) which she mistakenly believed to be right and she did so without questioning her own judgment or considering others. Because of this error, there was no mystical rebirth, Hollowness prevailed, and no mystical child was born to fill the empty room of Tiphereth. Exposed to the Sun of Tiphereth, Assia was destroyed: only the ashes of her Self survived.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. On the night of the Passover (as it became known) the Lord slew “all the first born of the land of Egypt, both man and beast” (Exodus 1:11-12), sparing only those obedient Jews who had smeared their doorways with the sacrificial blood of a lamb.

2. The “you” in ‘Shibboleth’ is more clearly associated with Assia than in some other Capriccio poems, but by the use of this pronoun Ted not only maintains the rational, impersonal approach suited his work on the Path of the Sword, he also confirms the loss of individual identity brought about by the Goddess in ‘The Pit and the Stones’.
3. Fortnum and Mason has held many royal licences, granted not only by English royalty but also by members of foreign royal families. It has always prided itself on its ability to ship anything anywhere in the world, but it is best known for supplying caviar and champagne picnic hampers and other ‘essential’ luxuries to the elite.
4. Priest-holes were concealed hiding-places for priests constructed in the homes of English Roman Catholic families so that they might continue to celebrate Mass during the times when Roman Catholics were persecuted by law.
5. All the sheep in one flock are said to be “tarred with the same brush”.
6. Perhaps co-incidentally, Kholstomer, too, is a story about the divisions between different groups of Nature’s creatures and about the misuse of power.
7. The bursting wardrobe, the love of Bach’s music and, especially, the reference to twenty million murdered people, which suggests the Jewish Holocaust, all hint that the ‘you’ in the poem is Assia. In the context of Cabbala, however, these roofless people may well be the exiled Jewish people and the ‘you’ in the poem the exiled daughter of Israel, the Shekinah. Her dwelling place is that of the Soul of the Jewish people. And the task of the Jewish Cabbalist is to reunite the Shekinah, who is the female aspect of God, with the male aspect of God and, thus, to end her, and Israel’s, exile and restore wholeness and harmony.
8. In Ted Hughes: Collected Poems, ‘fearlessly’ has been replaced by ‘selflessly’, thus reinforcing the folly and error of such thinking.

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‘Opus 131’, ‘Familiar’, ‘Flame’, ‘Chlorophyll’.

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The final four poems of Capriccio occupy the Sephiroth of Netzach (7), Hod (8), Yesod (9) and Malkuth (10). Netzach and Hod, like Chesed and Gevurah, lie on the Pillars of Force and Form. Even in the Infernal Regions, they work together and their energies

are expressed, respectively, as an active, catabolic Force which breaks down old patterns and a passive, anabolic coalescence of new and abstract Forms.

‘Opus 131’ (C 17)

It is notable that in these last four poems, Assia is no longer an active participant in the Goddess’s plans. Already the Goddess has rendered her nameless and faceless. Now, at Netzach, in ‘Opus 131’, the very “heart” of her, “naked” and “faceless”, is exposed to the “horror” of another dark dimension. Netzach, in the Infernal Regions, lies in the dimension of the Fifth Palace of Hell, which is known as ‘The Shadow of Death’. Cabbalistically, this is the “wrong dimension” It is a place of darkness where Hecate’s carrion birds, the Ravens of Death and Dispersion, go about their ghastly business; a place where ordinary things, even “plain homely daylight”, are powerless to prevent this.

At Netzach, the Goddess uses the powerful energies of the number 7 (Venus’s number) to work on human desires and dreams. Through passion and ecstatic magic, often expressed in music, poetry, dance and other sensual energies, her active Netzachian force brings either renewed inspiration or disintegration and chaos. In the dimension of the Shadow of Death, there can be only chaos.

Opus131

‘Opus 131’ refers to a piece of music by Beethoven which has its own significance as an expression of the seven-fold, pattern-breaking powers of the Goddess at Netzach. Beethoven wrote his quartet, ‘Opus 131 in C-sharp-minor’, after a prolonged period of sickness, depression and compositional struggle. Plagued by his increasing deafness, he was trying, as Ted says in the poem, “to repair/ The huge constellations of his silence”; and, by breaking all the conventional rules of quartet form in this piece, he succeeded. Opus 131 is written in seven movements (rather than the usual four) which are played without pause so that the work has a sense of continuous energy, fluidity and wholeness¹. It was “life-line music” for Beethoven—a desperate attempt to break out of the staleness into which he had fallen—and it represented a completely new, inspired and imaginative expression of his genius. It was life-line music, too, for Assia and Ted, both of whom turned to Beethoven’s music for “consolation, prayer, transcendence”, and the sort of ecstatic release which could effect the “selective disconnecting of the pain centre” when disasters threatened².

Assia, in Ted’s poem, had particular need of that sensual disconnection from the pain centre, and of the healing this might bring, but she found that Beethoven’s music could no longer provide it. She had waited and “strained listening” to find in the wholeness of the circling “pure zero” patterns of Beethoven’s music, some resolution of her worries (“divorce” and “menopause”). Her desire, the thing her “heart panted for”, was for empathy with the healing beauty of the music (a typically sensual, Netzachian desire). She wanted to be carried away by it in ecstasy. Instead, Beethoven’s composition had “broken down” into its constituent parts: counterpoint, variations, divisions, the independent voices of each instrument; the very “notes” became “sharp faces”, dissociated, independent elements which, like Hecate’s Ravens, tore her apart.

Metaphorically, by the end of the poem, the sharp energy of each note had dismembered her, left her in chaos, and scattered her “different bits” in the universal pool of energies: emotionally and psychologically, Assia was now exhausted, still at the mercy of the Goddess, still waiting in this Hell of the Shadow of Death for some final resolution.

‘Familiar’ (C 18)

Familiar

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‘Familiar’ does describe the passive appearance of form, but it was a ghastly creature, “got up from some atrocity’s ground shadow” which came boldly “walking out” through the dark face of “a woman”. She was the un-named, unidentified one whose company it preferred “to non-existence”, almost as if she were the most convenient, rather than the specially chosen, woman for that purpose. She was “its field”, it “merely” used her body for warmth and was “silent”, and, because of the careful lack of punctuation after the phrase “oceanless waif”, both it and the woman lay inactive on the woman’s bed³.

‘Familiar’ is a word which has its roots in the Old French and Latin words for family. It denotes an intimate. In particular, it refers to a demonic spirit which attends a witch. Generally the demon is a small animal: the witch, a woman. In Ted’s poem woman and the animal were interdependent, and the animal half of this partnership was “of all creatures” a great shire horse.

“Why a horse?”, Ted asks. But his description of the horse identifies it with whiteness, the moon, bones “sucked empty” by starlight, and with atrocities, war and death. This mare was phantasmal: and she was clearly of Hecate’s world, not ours. A daughter of Leucippe, the White Mare who is yet one more form of the Hecate as Goddess of witchcraft⁴, she was the demon “work-horse” of a witch. But so closely linked was she with the woman that the woman asks “Am I it or is it me... ?”, for throughout *Capriccio*, she too has been the “work-horse” of the Goddess.

Assia did live close to Highbury Common, but the woman in ‘Familiar’ had no clear identity, only this interdependent intimate association between herself and the white mare. And it is this interdependence which expresses the energies of the number of Hod, which is 8, the linked circles of which depict the Mercurial connection of two worlds. 8 is the number associated with ritual magic; and, most significantly here, it is the number which is known as ‘The Double Feminine’ (SSN 69).

Through their “continuing nearness” and their intimate familiarity with each other, the white mare and the woman constituted the Double Feminine. But the ritual magic, in ‘Familiar’, was Hecate’s black magic. And the woman’s soul (the “migrant” spirit which

Mercury should have led through the darkness) was still not separated from her body. She had no spiritual freedom: no awareness of herself as separate from the migrant spirit of the white mare. "Which of us is the tired migrant?", she asked. But there was no answer: no enlightenment, as there should have been at Hod. There were only questions, and listlessness and passive acceptance of her spirit's bonding with that of this creature from the Underworld.

At Hod, where the number 8 holds the secret of balance, there can be no half-measures in the choice between personal limitations and spiritual freedom. This poem ends, however, with the woman still questioning her own personal and spiritual identity.

'Flame' (C 19)

Capriccio

'Flame, at Yesod (9), lies in the Seventh (and last) Palace of Hell which is the Palace of the dark Moon Goddesses and which is simply known as 'Hell'. Malkuth (10) also lies in this Palace.

Yesod is a Moon-governed interface where fluctuating tides of energy flow to-and fro between the Upper Tree, Yesod and Malkuth. It is the dream-place of our lives, a magical place of omens and clairvoyance, a place where underlying abstract patterns (personal and historical) are repeated in different ways, where matter is in flux and where our perceptions, especially our image of ourselves, are easily distorted. The Illusion of Yesod is 'Security'. It is also the place where new insight can make new beginnings possible.

Assia's identity, in her own eyes, was that of a woman who could bind a man to her with love. Her sense of security came from such a bonding and, also, from living with that man in a shared home. This had been the pattern of her life ever since she had married John Steel when she was just sixteen; and this was the dream in which she still believed. In 'Flame', Ted describes Assia's dream as being kept alive by her search for a new place to live: but the flame of her dream was fanned by artificial means – a "dusty chemistry" of "oxygen mask" and "Green" house names. These, and the "bared, bedroom floorboards" and "suspect" hints of salmon life beneath "stained" waters, were enough to breathe life into it; and "exact" and "measured" calculations of the "rent" (the material cost of such a change) were all that she considered. There was nothing new or real or truly life-giving in this scenario: and no consideration of anything but material existence. At Yesod, where the 'Foundation' of any new journey is established and where new insight makes enlightenment possible, such repetition of old, material patterns was disastrous. Even Assia intuitively suspected that there was "one, crucial grain of too-much" at "Green Farm", which undermined the security it seemed to offer, but she clung to her dream.

Resorting to magic and omens, she turned to the "oracular book". A traditional practice amongst some pious folk is to ask for God's guidance by letting the Bible or some other holy book fall open, then to randomly select a passage from it. But the book to which

Assia turned was the Complete Works of William Shakespeare. The oracular words she found there, as quoted in 'Flame', are spoken by Duke Vicentio at the beginning of Act III of Measure for Measure: but the sentence in the poem is incomplete, as if she read only the first part of it before rejecting its advice. In full, the sentence reads: "Be absolute for death; either death or life shall thereby be the sweeter"⁵. Duke Vicentio's speech urges spiritual preparation for death: the acceptance of death in life, since there is no escaping it. The incomplete sentence in 'Flame', however, seems to urge a simple worldly choice between death and life.

Misunderstanding the oracle, Assia rejected its advice and chose worldly life, ignoring everything but material considerations, even though it seemed to her that "the Master himself" (who may have been Shakespeare, or God, or whoever else spoke through the oracle) had "undersigned a different contract". Determined to make a new beginning, she found yet another house as a "back-up fail-safe": the Dower House – a place intended for widows, rather than for the bride that Assia wished to be. Here, the "paradisaal gardens" were a worldly parody of the Garden of Eden, and the gardener, a human substitute for the God who created the gardens of Paradise.

It is clear in 'Flame' that the Yesodic Illusion of 'Security' allowed Assia to think in terms of "protective devices", material things which, in fact, were only a makeshift "First Aid Kit" suitable for "bangs" small enough to be muffled by Manchester "bed-covers and blankets", and for "damage" minor enough to be limited by comfortable padding. None of these material precautions, however, was sufficient to protect her from the all-consuming "nuclear" explosion which actually occurred.

It is not known what "the signed bit of paper" was that acted as "detonator" for this "nuclear reaction" (Ted's metaphor here appropriately includes the destructive violence of Assia's reaction to the situation) but in the context of the poem's place at Yesod, (where, in Cabbala, the marriage of the Bride of Malkuth to the Bridegroom of Tiphereth is consummated) it was most likely something to do with Assia's recent divorce from David Wevill, whom she still loved, or with the unexpected news of his subsequent marriage to someone else⁶.

That "history" had "cast [Assia] to repeat itself" suggests the Yesodic perpetuation of abstract form, and it suggests also that Assia's suicide completed the repetition of the pattern of love, disorder, emotional upheaval and suicide which had occurred previously between Sylvia and Ted. Whatever the detonator was which came "after so many years" with such "precisely attuned" "synchrony", whatever phone call Assia "barely had time" to make, it is clear in the poem and in the context of its place in the Capriccio sequence, that the powerful magic of Hecate, and the enormous tidal flux of her energies at Yesod, were deadly. For the woman of the Capriccio poems, as for Assia, "it was all over".

'Chlorophyll' (C 20)

Chlorophyll: The green pigment in plants which absorbs energy from the sun in order to

transform carbon dioxide and water from the atmosphere into carbohydrates for growth and reproduction. In this process, oxygen is released.

Capriccio

Earth, Air, Fire, Water. All of these elements are embodied in the title which Ted chose for this final poem of Capriccio. All of these elements are eternally present at Malkuth (10). 'Chlorophyll' occupies the Sephira of Malkuth in the last Palace of Hell and, even in Hell, the energies of Malkuth are present and active, as they are throughout the created World.

The Queen of Malkuth is the Goddess of Nature, Mother Earth, the Shekinah, the Goddess who is known as the Inferior Mother: she is the Moon-lit reflection of The Superior Mother at Binah (3) and she combines darkness with light. Here at Malkuth, her powers over life and death bring ends and beginnings. And, in the number of Malkuth, which is 10, the circle of the human journey is completed and the 1 of the human individual, ('I'), is joined with the completeness of 0, the World Soul which is the indwelling Spirit of the Supreme Creator.

For Cabbalists, Malkuth is a place of gestation and preparation for rebirth. It is the place where body is joined to Soul so that a new journey can begin.

'Chlorophyll' is the most magical Cabbalistic poem of the whole Capriccio sequence. Its sixteen lines, numerologically, add up to 7, a number which possesses the deepest and most far-reaching symbolism of all the numbers, and which, like Malkuth itself, represents completion, form combined with Spirit, rest and preparation for a new journey. (SSN 55). 7 is the most sacred of numbers and by using it to shape this poem, Ted invoked the highest and most harmonious powers of Nature.

Within the poem, too, by the threefold repetition of the phrase "keys/ Of a sycamore", Ted invoked the Goddess, in particular in her manifestation as Mut, the Egyptian Mother Goddess whose tree is the sycamore, as it is also of her children, Isis and Osiris⁷.

Sycamore

In England, the double, winged seeds of the sycamore are known as 'keys', perhaps because they resemble the winding key of an old clock, but, as seeds, they are also the keys to the tree's rebirth and, so, embody the mystery and the mastery of Nature. Through these keys, Ted links the mundane and the spiritual in this poem. He also links Assia and himself ('she' and 'him') and, once again, by the use of pronouns instead of names he links the Goddess with a human male.

After Assia and David Wevill had visited Sylvia and Ted in Devon, Assia put a blade of grass in an envelope and posted it to Ted. It was a cryptic gift, a secret message, which suggested some shared understanding by which Ted would know her meaning. It was an invitation to share a hidden connection between them, and Ted accepted that invitation. Assia loved expensive perfumes, so the blade of grass may well have been "soaked in Dior", as if magically soaked in her essence. But this perfume was a worldly

essence, part of the seductive, “witchy doll” image, which in earlier Capriccio poems, was the mask or “coat” which Assia had chosen in order to conceal her true nature and to entice men. In the context of Capriccio, however, the “witchy doll” “inside” the blade of grass was also the Goddess, with all the dark, sexual powers she uses to seduce the human male.

Truly, inside a simple blade of grass lie all the powers of Nature. And in the blade of grass which Assia sent to Ted, lay the seeds of everything that happened to them.

As in the poem, the beginning of their relationship and the end (the grass and “the gravestone”) were present. There, “inside” the blade of grass were “her only daughter’s” birth and death. There, too, was a sample of the ashes of Assia’s torment and self-immolation⁸; a sample of the torment and guilt which Ted himself would experience after Assia’s death. Most importantly, inside that blade of grass, as now inside Ted’s poem, were (and are) the keys of a sycamore: not the symbolic sycamore which is the tree of Mut, but a sycamore, a worldly specimen of this tree. Spiralling down, “falling and turning in air”, and in our imaginations, these seeds fall to earth where, if conditions are right, they will germinate in the sun and rain. Air, Earth, Fire and Water, again are brought together in this imagery⁹.

The keys of the sycamore, in Nature and in this poem, contain the germ of life—that essential, inexplicable energy without which our material universe would not, and could not, exist. This is the fifth Element that is always present at Malkuth, and Ted planted it in his poem for Assia, for the reader, and for himself. So, he ensured that the cycle of death and life which he described throughout Capriccio would come full circle, and a new cycle could begin.

There is yet one more meaning hidden inside the keys of a sycamore in ‘Chlorophyll’. To see this meaning it is necessary to look back at the earlier poems of the Capriccio sequence and at all the suggestions that it was the Goddess’s caprice to manipulate this man and this woman for her own purposes. In particular, we should remember that in ‘The Mythographers’, the Goddess sealed the forehead of her chosen one with her own star.

Ted believed that the patterns of myth repeat themselves. He also believed that writers who, like him, explore their own inner world do so by “organizing the inner world or at least searching out the patterns there and that is mythology” ¹⁰. Throughout Capriccio Ted set his relationship with Assia in a mythic framework. It seems likely that in reflecting on the past as he wrote these poems, he not only used myth to distance himself from disturbing memories and emotions (as was necessary on this Path of the Sword), but that he also saw Assia and himself as replicating a mythic pattern. Their love for each other, and especially the hells they went through and the metaphorical and real death and dismemberment they suffered, together with Ted’s own belief in his calling as a shamanic poet, and his knowledge of the Mysteries and other occult, spiritual disciplines, all suggest that he saw similarities between his own journey and that of the sacrificed and reborn consort/son of the Goddess, and, in particular, of the

shamanic poets who are summoned to her service.

Ted's choice of the keys of a sycamore tree as a symbol of rebirth in 'Chlorophyll' reinforces this suggestion, for the sycamore is the tree of Osiris, and Osiris was closely associated in Egyptian mythology with the moon, the Underworld and death. His annual rebirth ensured the fertility of the world; and, like Attis, Adonis, Dionysus and other sacrificed gods he was consort of the Goddess of Nature. It seems that Ted believed that the Goddess used her powers to expose him to experiences which would teach him the lessons necessary for his task as her shamanic poet, the one who must fly to the underworld for healing energies and, through the imaginative power of his poetry, help to restore balance and harmony in our world.

So, through 'Chlorophyll', Ted used all his Cabbalistic and poetic skills to combine the mythic, the spiritual and the real in order to ensure that Assia's death would not be in vain; and to plant the seed of his own healing rebirth. Here on the Path of the Sword he undertook the difficult and dangerous task of plunging his sword into his own heart so that he could see his relationship with Assia more clearly; and could seek out and destroy whatever demons remained hidden. All of this was essential if he was to begin afresh on a new, poetic, Cabbalistic journey, as he did in Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers.

As if to complement Ted's Cabbalistic purpose and to complete the task he undertook in Capriccio, the Baskin etching which faces the poem 'Chlorophyll' in the Limited Edition of Capriccio depicts a phoenix-like bird arising from a green profusion of grasses, leaves and flowers.

In addition, on the very last page of the book – after the poems, after the short, beautifully shaped note outlining the publication details, after Ted's and Baskin's signatures – there sits one last Baskin etching. It is a picture of a spider, set in an eight-sided frame. It is a picture of the Goddess herself: she who sits at the centre of the Web of Illusion which is our world; she who is the Mystical Centre embodied in Nature; she who connects Heaven and Earth with her Mercurial thread.

Spider

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Opus 131 has been described as expressing savage, raw emotions, sadness and tragic foreboding, but it has at its heart a folk-like theme which binds the movements together with an ephemeral beauty and which ultimately explodes into ecstatic joy.
2. Ted, when asked about his sources of inspiration, said of Beethoven and Blake: "if you could dig to the bottom of my strata maybe their names and works would be the deepest traces". He also spoke of the violent energies of the world being expressed in the "violence of great works" and in "those moments of [of artistic genius] in Beethoven". Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1980. pp. 202 and 199).

3. The white mare is "oceanless", perhaps, because the white tops of rough, wind-blown waves are known as 'white horses': so, the sea is her element, as it is that of the Goddess.

4. Robert Graves notes that in 1673 a woman accused of witchcraft confessed to having been temporarily transformed into a mare. Graves, *The White Goddess*, Faber, 1977, p. 385.

5. In this speech Duke Vicentio expounds on the theme of an essay by French Hermeticist, Philippe Du Plessis Mornay, which in 1592 was translated into English by Mary Sidney, Duchess of Pembroke, sister of Sir Philip Sidney the leader of the Areopagus poets who used Cabbalistic number theory in their poems. Du Mornay wrote: "Neither ought we to fly from death, for it is childish to fear it; and in fleeing from it we meet it". His *Discourse of Life and Death* ends: "Die to Live / Live to Die". Appropriately, *Measure for Measure*, despite its Cabbalistically balanced title, is a play about unbalanced love, lust, severe justice and trickery: above all, it demonstrates the need for balance.

6. On 9 Oct. 1968 Assia's divorce from David Wevill was granted. The letter from the Registry notifying her that it was final and absolute did not arrive until mid-February 1969. She wrote to David at that time wishing him every happiness. Shortly after that, unknown to Assia, David married again. For the first time since she married John Steele in 1947, Assia was unmarried and living alone with her small daughter. She was forty-two years old. In March Assia and Ted were house-hunting in Yorkshire. On 22 March Ted returned to Devon: Assia to her flat in London. On 23 March, 1969, Assia committed suicide, taking her small daughter with her.

7. Budge, W. *The Gods of the Egyptians*, Dover, NY, 1969, Book II, pp. 103, 107-8.

8. As described in 'The Error' (C 16).

9. Air is the Element of Mercury, who links heaven and earth. And, suitably, the round, linked, twin domes of a sycamore seed without its wings (as it will be when it begins to germinate) resemble Mercury's number, 8.

10. "Every writer", Ted told Faas, "develops either outwards into society and history... or inwards into imagination and beyond that into spirit... ". Everything he said to Faas about the summoning of shamanic poets and about their journey to the underworld for healing energies is also of particular relevance here. Faas, *op.cit.* pp. 204-206.

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'Opus 131', 'Familiar', 'Flame', 'Chlorophyll'.

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Assia did live close to Highbury Common, but the woman in ‘Familiar’ had no clear identity, only this interdependent intimate association between herself and the white

mare. And it is this interdependence which expresses the energies of the number of Hod, which is 8, the linked circles of which depict the Mercurial connection of two worlds. 8 is the number associated with ritual magic; and, most significantly here, it is the number which is known as 'The Double Feminine' (SSN 69).

Through their "continuing nearness" and their intimate familiarity with each other, the white mare and the woman constituted the Double Feminine. But the ritual magic, in 'Familiar', was Hecate's black magic. And the woman's soul (the "migrant" spirit which Mercury should have led through the darkness) was still not separated from her body. She had no spiritual freedom: no awareness of herself as separate from the migrant spirit of the white mare. "Which of us is the tired migrant?", she asked. But there was no answer: no enlightenment, as there should have been at Hod. There were only questions, and listlessness and passive acceptance of her spirit's bonding with that of this creature from the Underworld.

At Hod, where the number 8 holds the secret of balance, there can be no half-measures in the choice between personal limitations and spiritual freedom. This poem ends, however, with the woman is still questioning her own personal and spiritual identity.

'Flame' (C 19)

Capriccio

'Flame', at Yesod (9), lies in the Seventh (and last) Palace of Hell which is the Palace of the dark Moon Goddesses and which is simply known as 'Hell'. Malkuth (10) also lies in this Palace.

Yesod is a Moon-governed interface where fluctuating tides of energy flow to-and fro between the Upper Tree, Yesod and Malkuth. It is the dream-place of our lives, a magical place of omens and clairvoyance, a place where underlying abstract patterns (personal and historical) are repeated in different ways, where matter is in flux and where our perceptions, especially our image of ourselves, are easily distorted. The Illusion of Yesod is 'Security'. It is also the place where new insight can make new beginnings possible.

Assia's identity, in her own eyes, was that of a woman who could bind a man to her with love. Her sense of security came from such a bonding and, also, from living with that man in a shared home. This had been the pattern of her life ever since she had married John Steel when she was just sixteen; and this was the dream in which she still believed. In 'Flame', Ted describes Assia's dream as being kept alive by her search for a new place to live: but the flame of her dream was fanned by artificial means – a "dusty chemistry" of "oxygen mask" and "Green" house names. These, and the "bared, bedroom floorboards" and "suspect" hints of salmon life beneath "stained" waters, were enough to breathe life into it; and "exact" and "measured" calculations of the "rent" (the material cost of such a change) were all that she considered. There was nothing new or real or truly life-giving in this scenario: and no consideration of anything but material existence. At Yesod, where the 'Foundation' of any new journey is established and

where new insight make enlightenment possible, such repetition of old, material patterns was disastrous. Even Assia intuitively suspected that there was “one, crucial grain of too-much” at “Green Farm”, which undermined the security it seemed to offer, but she clung to her dream.

Resorting to magic and omens, she turned to the “oracular book”. A traditional practice amongst some pious folk is to ask for God’s guidance by letting the Bible or some other holy book fall open, then to randomly selecting a passage from it. But the book to which Assia turned was the Complete Works of William Shakespeare. The oracular words she found there, as quoted in ‘Flame’, are spoken by Duke Vicentio at the beginning of Act III of Measure for Measure: but the sentence in the poem is incomplete, as if she read only the first part of it before rejecting its advice. In full, the sentence reads: “Be absolute for death; either death or life shall thereby be the sweeter”⁵. Duke Vicentio’s speech urges spiritual preparation for death: the acceptance of death in life, since there is no escaping it. The incomplete sentence in ‘Flame’, however, seems to urge a simple worldly choice between death and life.

Misunderstanding the oracle, Assia rejected its advice and chose worldly life, ignoring everything but material considerations, even though it seemed to her that “the Master himself” (who may have been Shakespeare, or God, or whoever else spoke through the oracle) had “undersigned a different contract”. Determined to make a new beginning, she found yet another house as a “back-up fail-safe”: the Dower House – a place intended for widows, rather than for the bride that Assia wished to be. Here, the “paradisal gardens” were a worldly parody of the Garden of Eden, and the gardener, a human substitute for the God who created the gardens of Paradise.

It is clear in ‘Flame’ that the Yesodic Illusion of ‘Security’ allowed Assia to think in terms of “protective devices”, material things which, in fact, were only a makeshift “First Aid Kit” suitable for “bangs” small enough to be muffled by Manchester “bed-covers and blankets”, and for “damage” minor enough to be limited by comfortable padding. None of these material precautions, however, was sufficient to protect her from the all-consuming “nuclear” explosion which actually occurred.

It is not known what “the signed bit of paper” was that acted as “detonator” for this “nuclear reaction” (Ted’s metaphor here appropriately includes the destructive violence of Assia’s reaction to the situation) but in the context of the poem’s place at Yesod, (where, in Cabbala, the marriage of the Bride of Malkuth to the Bridegroom of Tiphereth is consummated) it was most likely something to do with Assia’s recent divorce from David Wevill, whom she still loved, or with the unexpected news of his subsequent marriage to someone else⁶.

That “history” had “cast [Assia] to repeat itself” suggests the Yesodic perpetuation of abstract form, and it suggests also that Assia’s suicide completed the repetition of the pattern of love, disorder, emotional upheaval and suicide which had occurred previously between Sylvia and Ted. Whatever the detonator was which came “after so many years” with such “precisely attuned” “synchrony”, whatever phone call Assia “barely had

time” to make, it is clear in the poem and in the context of its place in the Capriccio sequence, that the powerful magic of Hecate, and the enormous tidal flux of her energies at Yesod, were deadly. For the woman of the Capriccio poems, as for Assia, “it was all over”.

‘Chlorophyll’ (C 20)

Chlorophyll: The green pigment in plants which absorbs energy from the sun in order to transform carbon dioxide and water from the atmosphere into carbohydrates for growth and reproduction. In this process, oxygen is released.

Capriccio

Earth, Air, Fire, Water. All of these elements are embodied in the title which Ted chose for this final poem of Capriccio. All of these elements are eternally present at Malkuth (10). ‘Chlorophyll’ occupies the Sephira of Malkuth in the last Palace of Hell and, even in Hell, the energies of Malkuth are present and active, as they are throughout the created World.

The Queen of Malkuth is the Goddess of Nature, Mother Earth, the Shekinah, the Goddess who is known as the Inferior Mother: she is the Moon-lit reflection of The Superior Mother at Binah (3) and she combines darkness with light. Here at Malkuth, her powers over life and death bring ends and beginnings. And, in the number of Malkuth, which is 10, the circle of the human journey is completed and the 1 of the human individual, (‘I’), is joined with the completeness of 0, the World Soul which is the indwelling Spirit of the Supreme Creator.

For Cabbalists, Malkuth is a place of gestation and preparation for rebirth. It is the place where body is joined to Soul so that a new journey can begin.

‘Chlorophyll’ is the most magical Cabbalistic poem of the whole Capriccio sequence. Its sixteen lines, numerologically, add up to 7, a number which possesses the deepest and most far-reaching symbolism of all the numbers, and which, like Malkuth itself, represents completion, form combined with Spirit, rest and preparation for a new journey. (SSN 55). 7 is the most sacred of numbers and by using it to shape this poem, Ted invoked the highest and most harmonious powers of Nature.

Within the poem, too, by the threefold repetition of the phrase “keys/ Of a sycamore”, Ted invoked the Goddess, in particular in her manifestation as Mut, the Egyptian Mother Goddess whose tree is the sycamore, as it is also of her children, Isis and Osiris⁷.

Sycamore

In England, the double, winged seeds of the sycamore are known as ‘keys’, perhaps because they resemble the winding key of an old clock, but, as seeds, they are also the keys to the tree’s rebirth and, so, embody the mystery and the mastery of Nature. Through these keys, Ted links the mundane and the spiritual in this poem. He also links Assia and himself (‘she’ and ‘him’) and, once again, by the use of pronouns instead of

names he links the Goddess with a human male.

After Assia and David Wevill had visited Sylvia and Ted in Devon, Assia put a blade of grass in an envelope and posted it to Ted. It was a cryptic gift, a secret message, which suggested some shared understanding by which Ted would know her meaning. It was an invitation to share a hidden connection between them, and Ted accepted that invitation. Assia loved expensive perfumes, so the blade of grass may well have been “soaked in Dior”, as if magically soaked in her essence. But this perfume was a worldly essence, part of the seductive, “witchy doll” image, which in earlier *Capriccio* poems, was the mask or “coat” which Assia had chosen in order to conceal her true nature and to entice men. In the context of *Capriccio*, however, the “witchy doll” “inside” the blade of grass was also the Goddess, with all the dark, sexual powers she uses to seduce the human male.

Truly, inside a simple blade of grass lie all the powers of Nature. And in the blade of grass which Assia sent to Ted, lay the seeds of everything that happened to them.

As in the poem, the beginning of their relationship and the end (the grass and “the gravestone”) were present. There, “inside” the blade of grass were “her only daughter’s” birth and death. There, too, was a sample of the ashes of Assia’s torment and self-immolation⁸; a sample of the torment and guilt which Ted himself would experience after Assia’s death. Most importantly, inside that blade of grass, as now inside Ted’s poem, were (and are) the keys of a sycamore: not the symbolic sycamore which is the tree of Mut, but a sycamore, a worldly specimen of this tree. Spiralling down, “falling and turning in air”, and in our imaginations, these seeds fall to earth where, if conditions are right, they will germinate in the sun and rain. Air, Earth, Fire and Water, again are brought together in this imagery⁹.

The keys of the sycamore, in Nature and in this poem, contain the germ of life—that essential, inexplicable energy without which our material universe would not, and could not, exist. This is the fifth Element that is always present at Malkuth, and Ted planted it in his poem for Assia, for the reader, and for himself. So, he ensured that the cycle of death and life which he described throughout *Capriccio* would come full circle, and a new cycle could begin.

There is yet one more meaning hidden inside the keys of a sycamore in ‘Chlorophyll’. To see this meaning it is necessary to look back at the earlier poems of the *Capriccio* sequence and at all the suggestions that it was the Goddess’s caprice to manipulate this man and this woman for her own purposes. In particular, we should remember that in ‘The Mythographers’, the Goddess sealed the forehead of her chosen one with her own star.

Ted believed that the patterns of myth repeat themselves. He also believed that writers who, like him, explore their own inner world do so by “organizing the inner world or at least searching out the patterns there and that is mythology” ¹⁰. Throughout *Capriccio* Ted set his relationship with Assia in a mythic framework. It seems likely that in

reflecting on the past as he wrote these poems, he not only used myth to distance himself from disturbing memories and emotions (as was necessary on this Path of the Sword), but that he also saw Assia and himself as replicating a mythic pattern. Their love for each other, and especially the hells they went through and the metaphorical and real death and dismemberment they suffered, together with Ted's own belief in his calling as a shamanic poet, and his knowledge of the Mysteries and other occult, spiritual disciplines, all suggest that he saw similarities between his own journey and that of the sacrificed and reborn consort/son of the Goddess, and, in particular, of the shamanic poets who are summoned to her service.

Ted's choice of the keys of a sycamore tree as a symbol of rebirth in 'Chlorophyll' reinforces this suggestion, for the sycamore is the tree of Osiris, and Osiris was closely associated in Egyptian mythology with the moon, the Underworld and death. His annual rebirth ensured the fertility of the world; and, like Attis, Adonis, Dionysus and other sacrificed gods he was consort of the Goddess of Nature. It seems that Ted believed that the Goddess used her powers to expose him to experiences which would teach him the lessons necessary for his task as her shamanic poet, the one who must fly to the underworld for healing energies and, through the imaginative power of his poetry, help to restore balance and harmony in our world.

So, through 'Chlorophyll', Ted used all his Cabbalistic and poetic skills to combine the mythic, the spiritual and the real in order to ensure that Assia's death would not be in vain; and to plant the seed of his own healing rebirth. Here on the Path of the Sword he undertook the difficult and dangerous task of plunging his sword into his own heart so that he could see his relationship with Assia more clearly; and could seek out and destroy whatever demons remained hidden. All of this was essential if he was to begin afresh on a new, poetic, Cabbalistic journey, as he did in Birthday Letters and Howls & Whispers.

As if to complement Ted's Cabbalistic purpose and to complete the task he undertook in Capriccio, the Baskin etching which faces the poem 'Chlorophyll' in the Limited Edition of Capriccio depicts a phoenix-like bird arising from a green profusion of grasses, leaves and flowers.

In addition, on the very last page of the book – after the poems, after the short, beautifully shaped note outlining the publication details, after Ted's and Baskin's signatures – there sits one last Baskin etching. It is a picture of a spider, set in an eight-sided frame. It is a picture of the Goddess herself: she who sits at the centre of the Web of Illusion which is our world; she who is the Mystical Centre embodied in Nature; she who connects Heaven and Earth with her Mercurial thread.

Spider

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Opus 131 has been described as expressing savage, raw emotions, sadness and tragic foreboding, but it has at its heart a folk-like theme which binds the movements

together with an ephemeral beauty and which ultimately explodes into ecstatic joy.

2. Ted, when asked about his sources of inspiration, said of Beethoven and Blake: "if you could dig to the bottom of my strata maybe their names and works would be the deepest traces". He also spoke of the violent energies of the world being expressed in the "violence of great works" and in "those moments of [of artistic genius] in Beethoven". Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1980. pp. 202 and 199).

3. The white mare is "oceanless", perhaps, because the white tops of rough, wind-blown waves are known as 'white horses': so, the sea is her element, as it is that of the Goddess.

4. Robert Graves notes that in 1673 a woman accused of witchcraft confessed to having been temporarily transformed into a mare. Graves, *The White Goddess*, Faber, 1977, p. 385.

5. In this speech Duke Vicentio expounds on the theme of an essay by French Hermeticist, Philippe Du Plessis Mornay, which in 1592 was translated into English by Mary Sidney, Duchess of Pembroke, sister of Sir Philip Sidney the leader of the Areopagus poets who used Cabbalistic number theory in their poems. Du Mornay wrote: "Neither ought we to fly from death, for it is childish to fear it; and in fleeing from it we meet it". His *Discourse of Life and Death* ends: "Die to Live / Live to Die". Appropriately, *Measure for Measure*, despite its Cabbalistically balanced title, is a play about unbalanced love, lust, severe justice and trickery: above all, it demonstrates the need for balance.

6. On 9 Oct. 1968 Assia's divorce from David Wevill was granted. The letter from the Registry notifying her that it was final and absolute did not arrive until mid-February 1969. She wrote to David at that time wishing him every happiness. Shortly after that, unknown to Assia, David married again. For the first time since she married John Steele in 1947, Assia was unmarried and living alone with her small daughter. She was forty-two years old. In March Assia and Ted were house-hunting in Yorkshire. On 22 March Ted returned to Devon: Assia to her flat in London. On 23 March, 1969, Assia committed suicide, taking her small daughter with her.

7. Budge, W. *The Gods of the Egyptians*, Dover, NY, 1969, Book II, pp. 103, 107-8.

8. As described in 'The Error' (C 16).

9. Air is the Element of Mercury, who links heaven and earth. And, suitably, the round, linked, twin domes of a sycamore seed without its wings (as it will be when it begins to germinate) resemble Mercury's number, 8.

10. "Every writer", Ted told Faas, "develops either outwards into society and history... or inwards into imagination and beyond that into spirit... ". Everything he said to Faas

about the summoning of shamanic poets and about their journey to the underworld for healing energies is also of particular relevance here. Faas, op.cit. pp. 204-206.

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An Addendum to this paper, added 31 August 2017, contains further notes on 'The Sorrows of the Deer': the earliest title for Birthday Letters.

I began my investigation into Ted Hughes' use of Cabbala in Birthday Letters in 1999 and completed it in 2006, before the Birthday Letters manuscripts were sold to the British Library, and well before 2010 when they were catalogued and first made available for public scrutiny. Consequently, when this was possible, I was keen to discover whether there was any clear evidence in these manuscripts to support my thesis that Ted was using Cabbala as a "Memory System", and using it in the way in which he believed Shakespeare had done, i.e. using (in Ted's own words) "as-if-visialization as the first principle for effective meditation (as in St Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Disciplines, as well as Cabbala)". In this same passage in Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, Ted goes on to list the four ethical aims of Cabbala and notes that these are also "the cornerstone of the Gnostic Myth of Sophia"¹.

Amongst the many manuscripts, typescripts and notebooks in the Birthday Letters archive, there are multiple drafts, revisions and corrections of each poem and many lists in which Ted ordered and re-ordered the sequence of poems. There is one mind map which places the Gnostic Sophia at its centre and has the word 'Klipoth' (meaning 'Shells'— the averse, unbalanced, demonic energies of Cabbala) linked to one of its thought lines². And there is one book, a black, new-looking Address Book, in which, under different sections, Ted listed every aspect of each of the ten Sephiroth (energy channels or "Angelic Powers"³) of the Cabbalistic Tree of Life⁴.

In the 'B' section of the book, for example, Ted's notes are headed "Geburah" and he lists 43 different aspects of the energies of Geburah (Sephira 5) and its associated influences, including: God Name; Archangel; Spiritual Experience; Mundane Chakra: Vice; Virtue; Body part; Egyptian, Greek and Viking Gods; Astrological Sign, Perfume, Plant and Gemstone; Four Tarot Cards; and its manifestation in each of the four Cabbalistic Worlds of Atziluth, Briah, Yetzirah and Assiah. He deals with each of the 9 other Sephiroth in other sections of this book and apart from that the rest of the pages are blank.

Other notebooks and lists in the archive show that Ted constantly rewrote and revised

many of the poems. Even after they had been typed he would change words and sections and, in some cases, stick strips of paper on which he had made corrections over the original text. Most of the poems were eventually published in *Birthday Letters* (Faber, 1998) often in very different form to some of the drafts in the notebooks; some appear in *Howls & Whispers* (first published as a Limited Edition by Leonard Baskin's Gehenna Press in 1998); and all the poems from one particular notebook and its associated separate sheets were published as *Capriccio* (first published as a Limited Edition by the Gehenna Press in 1990). This particular old school exercise book is distinguished by an upside-down 'A' stuck in yellow tape onto its cover⁵.

There are a number of unpublished poems, some of which were included in Ted's hand-written lists of poems but are absent from the typed lists which were eventually sent to Christopher Reid, who was then Ted's Poetry Editor at Faber and Faber. Some appear in the typed lists but were not included in *Birthday Letters*. These include the poem which begins "What did happen that Saturday night?" and which was later published as 'Last Letter' in *The New Statesman Magazine* in October 2010; and two poems about Ted's girl friend at the time when he began to court Sylvia. One of these describes a disastrous meeting with this girl, when she catches him trying to hide under a bush, because he was on his way to meet Sylvia carrying a bottle of wine and a large piece of steak (the weight of the steak differs in different drafts).

Some drafts may well have become later published poems but the connection is hard to trace. One, in particular, which describes a walk across the moors to *Wuthering Heights* and the discovery of a wounded grouse which Ted puts out of its misery, prompting a furious reaction from Sylvia, has the same theme as 'The Rabbit Catcher' (a title which first appears in the typed lists) but is a totally different poem in a quite different setting.

Of particular significance are a number of old school exercise books labelled "Vicar's Hill, Boldre", on most of which a student has written his name and a school subject: 'Scripture', 'French' etc. Ted has labelled nine of these books S1 to S9 (the 'S' almost certainly alludes to Sylvia) and each contains drafts and sometimes loose sheets of poems most, but not all of which, became *Birthday Letters* poems⁶.

In books S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5, Ted has inscribed the title "The Sorrows of the Deer". This was clearly the original title that he chose for the *Birthday Letters* sequence.

In 2003, when Daniel Weissbort was working on his book, *Ted Hughes: Selected Translations*, he told me of Ted's fascination with a poem written by the Hungarian poet Ferenc Juhász – 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets'. It is possible that Ted had first seen this poem in one of the collections of Hungarian poetry which he began to acquire when his interest in Eastern European poetry was first aroused. One anthology of Hungarian poetry from the 13th century to the present day, translated into French, was presented to Ted by the Hungarian poet Janos Csokits in 1963. Ted certainly saw the poem in *The Plough and the Pen: Writing from Hungary 1930-19567*, and, as Daniel Weissbort records in his book, he thought the translation by Kenneth McRobbie "problematic", so he immediately rewrote it "working with great

concentration and at speed”⁸.

Juhász’s poem can be interpreted in many ways, including as a version of Acteon’s vision of the Goddess and its results (“human tears shone on his stag’s face” in Ted’s poem ‘Acteon’ in his *Tales From Ovid*⁹); or even just as a poem about lost loved ones. If nothing else, Juhász’s lines – “He stood over the Universe, on the ringed summit / there the boy stood at the gate of secrets” – would have caught Ted’s attention.

Ted was, of course, well aware that Robert Graves identified the stag as being sacred to the Great Goddess. Chapter XIV of *The White Goddess* is titled ‘The Roebuck in the Thicket’; and according to Graves the Roebuck hides in a thicket of twenty-two sacred trees and its meaning is “Hides the Secret”¹⁰. Twenty-two happens to be the number of paths connecting the ten Sephiroth on the Cabbalistic Tree and the number of cards in the Major Arcana of the Tarot pack. Whether or not this was significant for Graves (he does not mention it), Ted would have known it; and it seems that Ted sometimes identified with the Roebuck. In a letter to Keith Sagar, talking about his decision to return to writing poems about his life with Sylvia, Ted writes of: “the huge outcry that flushed me from my thicket in 70–71–72 when Sylvia’s poems & novel hit the first militant wave of Feminism as a divine revelation from their Patron Saint”¹¹.

Ted’s enduring interest in the sorrows associated with the Great Goddess’s shape-shifting, secret-hiding deer is clear. In 1978, when he and Seamus Heaney were collecting poems for *The Rattle Bag*, he wrote to Terence McCaughey asking “what is ‘The Sorrows of the Deer’?”¹². It turned out to be ‘The Deer’s Cry’, St Patrick’s hymn, translated from the Celtic by Kuno Meyer¹³, and it was not included in *The Rattle Bag*. Also, among a number of books of Hungarian poetry in Ted’s library (now held at Emory University in Atlanta) is an anthology entitled: *In Quest of the Miracle Stag: the Poetry of Hungary*¹⁴ which was published in 1996.

Each of the “Sorrows of the Deer” school exercise books, labelled S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5, contains Birthday Letters poems which have been given numbers by Ted and, if the published sequence is numbered consecutively from 1 (beginning with ‘Fulbright Scholars’) to 88, each book’s poems seem to group in different parts of that sequence. S1 contains eleven poems which appear between the positions 42 and 57 in the published sequence. S2 had eleven poems between 16 and 30. S3 has eight poems between 3 and 15. S4 only one poem at position 36. And S5 has five poems between 31 and 38.

Books marked S6, S7, S8 and S9 contain, respectively, sixteen, one, six and three of the published poems, but Ted has not numbered any of them.

A further, blue, exercise book (column 14 in the chart mentioned below) is marked by Ted “Book List January-April 1985”. It lists 48 drafts or titles of poems grouped into sections which are labelled, and refer to, S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5. Not all of these poems appear to be in the designated books; nor do all of them appear in the published sequence. The listed poems have been numbered and re-numbered by Ted; and the

order of those which do appear in the published sequence is different to Ted's numbering.

As must already be apparent, because of the number of notebooks, notes, poems, drafts, re-numberings, correction and lists in the British Library's Birthday Letters archive, any discussion of the contents is complex and confusing. Chart 1, (below), therefore seeks to present an overall picture of the archive, and my detailed discussion of it is presented in the Appendix at the end of this paper.

Clearly, it is not possible, from the material in the Birthday Letters archive, to definitively trace the order in which Ted wrote the Birthday Letters poems or the date at which he wrote any of them. Nor is it possible to make coherent sense of the way in which he went about choosing the order in which he wanted them to be published. So, it is not possible to say whether or not he deliberately set out to write these poems as a healing, Cabbalistic journey.

Nevertheless, given Ted's lifelong interest in mysticism, magic and the healing power of poetry, and his use of Alchemy and Cabbala in structuring, for example, *Cave Birds* and *Adam and the Sacred Nine*¹⁵; given, too, his undoubted interest and knowledge of Cabbala as evidenced in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, I cannot believe that the remarkable consistency with which the Birthday Letters poems fit each stage of the journey along the 22 paths of the Cabbalistic Tree, in each of the four Cabbalistic Worlds is pure coincidence¹⁶. The presence of even the few Cabbalistic notes and references in the British Library's Birthday Letters archive indicates that Ted did, at least, have Cabbala in mind when he was writing the poems. And it is obvious that his method of 'conjuring' Sylvia and Assia into the poems reflects exactly the Cabbalistic techniques which he described in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* as "magically animated imagination": a way of "conjuring...hallucinatory figures – with whom conversations can be held" a way of creating "internally structured poetic images" which unfold "multiple meanings" and, above all, the use of poetic drama "as a ritual for the manipulation of the soul"¹⁷.

chart 1

Listed in the first columns on the far left of the chart are the titles of the Birthday Letters poems in the order 1 to 88 in which they appear in the Faber 1998 published edition. Each extra column represents one of the books or lists in the archive and a tick indicates which poems appear in this notebook or list, together with any number or numbers ascribed to it by Ted. Identifying details; the British Library Call Number; and the number ascribed to it by Roy Davids (RD) in notes on the archive which he provided for the British Library appears at the top of each column.

Appendix

In addition to the books S1 to S9 and the Book List already discussed, other books in the British Library's Birthday Letters archive provide the following information:

The Blue Triplicate notebook (column 10), which is possibly the most important